

**TESTIMONY OF MAINE IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS COALITION
SUPPORTING L.D. 1612:**

An Act to Address Food Insecurity and Support Local Agriculture

Sponsor: Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross of Portland

Public Hearing: Tuesday, April 19th, 2023, at 9:00 am

Dear Members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry:

We are writing on behalf of the board and members of the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition in support of L.D. 1612: An Act to Address Food Insecurity and Support Local Agriculture. MIRC is a coalition of almost 100 organizations from across the state committed to advancing and defending the rights of Maine's immigrant communities. We (Tobin and Ruben) are MIRC's Advocacy and Policy team.

MIRC's mission is to improve the legal, social, and economic conditions experienced by immigrants, therefore improving the state as a whole. To do so, we partner with allies working toward similar goals. We have seen firsthand the devastating impact of food insecurity on our communities. Many of the individuals and families we serve at MIRC struggle to access healthy and nutritious food, which can have serious consequences for their health, well-being, and overall quality of life.

This is why our organization partners with the Preble Street Food Security Hub to provide food to hotels in Cumberland and York Counties, where many asylum-seeking immigrants are currently residing in hotels and temporary shelters. The Hub has been an invaluable resource in joining MIRC in this effort, helping us to distribute food to those who need it most and ensuring that people without permanent housing still have access to the nutritious meals they need to stay healthy. We are especially grateful that Preble Street is intentional in their work of eliminating racial disparities when it comes to hunger. They are cognizant that almost 30% of Mainers of color are food insecure (compared to less than 2% of the entire population).

The much-needed one-time funding from L.D. 1612 would allow Preble Street to finish renovations that would allow the Food Security Hub to provide up to 10,000 meals per day throughout the state. An added benefit of this legislation would be distribution of the Feeding Maine network's products into food pantries around the state, supporting local agriculture while mitigating hunger. This legislation would be a win-win, not just for Maine people but also Maine businesses like Liberation Farms and Jordan's Farm.

By passing L.D. 1612, you can improve the health and well-being of Maine's residents, particularly those most vulnerable to food insecurity, such as low-income families and individuals of all backgrounds. By ensuring that more Mainers have access to healthy food, we can reduce rates of chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Furthermore, investing in food security programs can strengthen our communities and our economy; when people have access to healthy food, they are better able to work, learn, and contribute to our society. This can translate into improved productivity, increased economic activity, and reduced healthcare costs. An investment in this now can pay big returns in the future.

Moreover, supporting local agriculture and food systems can create jobs, boost economic development, and reduce our reliance on imported food, which in turn can support a more resilient and sustainable food system. L.D. 1612 is an important step in addressing food insecurity throughout Maine, and we strongly urge the Committee to pass it. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Tobin Williamson and Ruben Torres
Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition

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