

James Hanna
Cumberland County Food Security Council
LD 1670

Testimony of Jim Hanna of Portland in Support of LD 1670, An Act to Strengthen Maine's Agriculture, Food and Forest Economy by Funding the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund and Amending Related Provisions of Law

Honorable Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

As Executive Director of the Cumberland County Food Security Council (CCFSC), I represent a diverse food system coalition that agrees that our power to build nutrition security and end hunger depends on the strength of Maine's ability to produce its own food. We believe that our country's inequitable access to resources for historically disadvantaged producers is a significant barrier to their participation in local food systems.

For Maine's local food production system to thrive, it must support all those who aspire to provide food for our communities. This legislation intentionally addresses racial equity and lack of access to capital and technical assistance that historically disadvantaged populations have had in food related industries. Another important element of this investment is that it supports development of infrastructure specific to processing and adding value to food grown by Maine farmers and ranchers, particularly under resourced and socially disadvantaged farmers.

I was part of the team that prepared the report in response to LD 870: Resolve, Directing the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations To Study the Impact of Policies Regarding Agriculture, Access to Land, Access to Grants and Access to Financing on African-American and Indigenous Farmers in the State. Our work developed recommendations including the "creation of and funding allocation for set-asides for Black/African American and Indigenous farming and food-based projects that will aid in purchasing land, equipment, general operational costs, etc." LD 1670 can do this.

As this committee has observed, the requests for the AIIP funding were nine times what was available for distribution. Owners of small farms and livestock operations need access to capital to compete with large agricultural corporations and build our local food economy.

CCFSC supports this \$20 million investment in technical assistance to critical infrastructure for FY2024 and 2025. This is a rare opportunity to provide a funding source for the state's critical agriculture and food enterprises, enabling small businesses to innovate and grow.