

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Pluecker, and members of the AFC Committee,

I represent no entity or agency other than myself as a resident, taxpayer, and property owner in Maine, and am testifying in strong support of LD1823.

For the last seven years I've watched food freedom in Maine expand and even witnessed my own Town finally assert its right to define the food systems of its own choosing. Along this journey I've met a lot of folks, took my time to understand them, share their goals, their losses, their dreams, and their struggles, and forged lasting friendships based on trust and respect. We are all good people with profound life experiences, with families, with hope. Not enemies.

- Since 2010, food sovereignty communities (*approximately 117 of them*) have swelled make up about a quarter of the entire State of Maine, in terms of population and by political subdivisions. Did the prophesy of impending waves of chaos consisting of food-borne illnesses and lawsuits in the absence of the heavy hand of the State over the last 12 years unfold? Did scores of bodies crash onto the streets of folks clutching their stomachs in agony over a bad whoopie pie or bowl of clam chowder? No to both. If someone says otherwise, they need to stand up and prove it publicly at the podium in front of you, rather than slandering a healthy movement that defines Maine and gives hope to Mainers and across the nation.
- The whole world is going to hell in a hand-basket and Maine has been ravaged by mental health, drug addiction, and homelessness epidemics for years, yet our unelected and unaccountable agency operatives are targeting families that are producing food for their communities in rural Maine? Are you kidding me, this insanity is still going on? If someone says that this makes sense, then they need to stand up and prove it publicly at the podium in front of you rather than slandering a healthy movement that defines Maine and gives hope to Mainers and across the nation.

ALERT: Guess what, food freedom helps to alleviate mental health issues, drug addiction, and homelessness.

- Food freedom attracts needed in-migration, improves the socio-economic condition, assists in every facet of healthy local and regional planning, dissolves the risks of racial and social inequality, and strengthens identity, cooperation, and ownership of the diverse peoples in our communities as we attempt to rebuild Maine. If someone is against these benefits, they need to stand up and state it publicly at the podium in front of you rather than slandering a healthy movement that defines Maine and gives hope to Mainers and across the nation.
- And less face it, Maine simply does not have the resources or infrastructure for sustainability and security right now, and it's at the end of the line in terms of national distribution and support. We really have no choice but to decentralize food production and allow local communities to become more resilient, secure, and healthy and get us out of the mess we're in. If some unelected unaccountable employee who gets a paycheck from me sees different, they can get a job in an authoritarian state elsewhere, rather than slandering a healthy movement that defines Maine and gives hope to Mainers and across the nation.

To me, given all of these factors, it seems quite numb to not to embrace food sovereignty.

When there are fearmongers among us, which there always will be, I tend to apply the Socrates "**Triple-filter test**" to any antagonist arguments against hope and opportunity:

- **Regarding the truth:** Does this person know for a fact that this information is true? Is this person willing to bet on it? Will this person be able to prove it to anyone? Are they willing to compromise their reputation and employment over this?
- **Regarding the good:** Does it benefit the person or all of Maine? Will their argument make them or Maine better and evoke positive emotions? Will the situation in Maine improve by oppressing hope and opportunity?
- **Regarding the necessary or useful:** By knowing this argument against hope and opportunity, will life in Maine improve? Should Maine take any practical action regarding this information or message? In what way does not knowing this information hurt or affect Maine?
- ***If what we are being told isn't true, isn't good, and isn't even useful, why would we entertain it?"***

On May 5, 2023, I was pleasantly surprised to find this legislative bill in my inbox. As a member of the LPC, I was asked to review it and provide the position of the region that I represent. I voted in favor of this bill, without question.

I was amazed at the deep thought and comprehension that went into this non-partisan bill, LD1823, and wondered for a moment why this oddly felt so different from the day-to-day poorly crafted and incomplete bills churned out in Augusta, you know, the ones that offer nothing less than a constant headache.

This was no typical emergency bill, it was not a stop-gap measure, it was not a favor bill, and it was not some half-baked attempt to provide temporary relief to those impacted by calamity, which the calamity is more often than not due to poor state policy-making. It is a bill affirming right, a document showing the State is taking its job seriously.

In an era of perpetual pandemics, water corporatization/theft, drug addiction, mental health issues, homelessness, cost of living burdens/inflation, bank failures, fearmongering, and war, this is also a bill of hope.

It came as a breath of fresh air to see Maine re-affirm and continue to differentiate itself from the other 49 states in the country in this bill. As people flee dysfunctional states across the country, Maine is a destination for those who seek the ideals of food resiliency and security, those who seek the ideals of creating and producing, and those who seek hope. Other States have been watching Maine and wishing to move in our direction as well (*Dirigo*), away from the jackboot authoritarian approach of a bygone era that's resulted in only oppression, dependency, monopolization, and corporatocracy.

The ideas laid forth in LD1823 are needed (*e.g. community gardens, land lease & conveyance for food production, food forests, edible landscapes*), as smaller communities in Maine sometimes need a catalyst, a spark, to begin the brainstorming process on what is possible as they shape and manage their local designs with local volunteers on a shoestring budget. No one knows everything, we all have to work together and share ideas.

Example: Do you know why most long-term comprehensive plans throughout Maine don't even mention **food resiliency and food security** at all? Because it doesn't exist in **30-A MRSA, Chapter 187** as a starting point or seed crystal for discussion. And since it isn't important enough to the State, it's not important to regional planning commissions (*who develop services and documents to support Towns*) either, so there's no box to check, and ultimately is not considered and largely overlooked by our Towns. But this is easily fixable.

In LD1823, the State truly backs up the talk with tangible **ACTION**, leading by example and proving that it desires an integrated State approach that honors the legislative construct of our state, our constitution, and all Mainers. **What a refreshing concept!**

What I do find quite disappointing, and why LD1823 is needed, is the lack of cohesion and communication identified between silos of unelected agencies throughout this State. Unaccountable agencies who harbor random employees that impose their subjective and arbitrary will on the citizenry, use that power of the state to intimidate Mainers in a manner that frustrates State law and our constitution, and skulk and collude behind closed doors to spread division, fear, anger, and resentment in the halls in Augusta. This is completely unacceptable, by any standard.

Besides being just plain wrong, these disconnects within the State give the public perception of a general lack of the leadership and functionality in Augusta (*things we desperately need*). This is what strains the public trust and paralyzes the healing and strengthening timeline of this state.

Legislating through rule-making, using the force of the State as a weapon against Mainers, and exhibiting an indifference to the State Constitution and our legal construct are all abhorrent practices that needs to stop. This should be culled out at the agency level and any power-tripping rogue employees or agencies need to be held accountable for their damaging behaviors.

In accordance with **Article 1 Section 25 of the State of Maine Constitution**, the legislature needs to affirm the will of the people through effective agency policy, accountability, and alignment measures. These measures will assure the spirit of the constitutional amendment is being executed by all employees with the State, and reduces rogue inter-agency actions that create liability for Maine, damages the public trust, and slows healthy growth in our communities.

Hope is free. I like hope. It helps you all as well by making your jobs easier (*and more enjoyable*). I'll take hope any day of the week over someone who walks up to the podium today and pimps fear, anger, resentment, and division. When was the last time you saw a message of hope in the media? It's been a long time and we all miss it so and want it back so.

Fear, anger, resentment, and division are far more dangerous than any home-baked pie bought from a friend thinking of starting a business could ever be. I'm done with fear, anger, resentment, and division, and so is everyone else. Let's be reasonable and promote hope.

If someone decides their life decisions should be based on fear, **fine**, let them use our coveted New England local town meeting structure that is the envy of others across the nation (e.g. *petition, organize, run for local government, debate in town meetings*), go argue the merits of living in fear and the benefits of government clamping down on freedom, opportunity, and hope to their own neighbors, family, and friends if that is one's desire, and look them right in the eye with a straight face when they do it. But leave that fear at the political boundary of your own town, as this fear should not be spread like a disease and done so anonymously through the State, as it does not supersede communities who use the New England town meeting process for its intended purpose, to solve problems and argue the merits of opportunity and hope.

We need to step aside, refrain from the heavy-handed and fruitless approach of the past, and allow our communities to figure out how to best address the food security and resiliency problem in Maine. Historically, whenever there was a problem facing us, it was and will always continue to be solved best at the local level.

"When, in some obscure country town, the farmers come together to a special town meeting, to express their opinion on some subject which is vexing the land, that, I think, is the true Congress, and the most respectable one that is ever assembled in the United States." ~Henry David Thoreau.

I urge the committee to vote **OUGHT TO PASS on LD1823**, a positive bill in an era of struggle that is filled to the brim with tasty, nutritious goodness, a buoyant bill that quickly rises to the surface in a sea of otherwise disappointing half-baked measures and oily mistakes cooked up in Augusta.