



Testimony in support of LD 362 Resolve, To Require the Department of Education to Form a Family Income Data Collection Working Group

March 8, 2021

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is John Rorke and I am the Research Manager for Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine. We have a network of more than 500 partner agencies, supporting our mission to eliminate hunger in Maine by improving access to nutritious food for people in need, building strong community partnerships, and mobilizing the public in the fight to end hunger. Last year, through our network, we distributed 27 million meals across the entire state.

I am here to testify in support of LD 362, Resolve, To Require the Department of Education to Form a Family Income Data Collection Working Group.

The COVID-19 pandemic put the issue of childhood hunger front and center, highlighting the critical role of the federal school meals programs in providing food to children who otherwise may go without. Other nutrition programs, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) became even more important in stabilizing the lives of Maine families and children, and thankfully, the federal government responded rapidly last spring with the Pandemic-EBT program to fill the meal gap that the new remote-school environment threatened.

Government nutrition programs are designed to work together in this way, with one program often picking up where another left off. However, applying for and receiving benefits can be anything but seamless. For children in particular, we believe the process of applying for and receiving vital food assistance should be as simple as possible. Currently, cumbersome data collection requirements to qualify children for public assistance programs can burden school nutrition departments as well as parents. We hope that the intent of this bill is to simplify the family income data schools are required to collect, streamline application processes to qualify eligible children for multiple assistance programs where appropriate, and ultimately allow more children across Maine to receive the food they need to learn and grow.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
John Rorke

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