



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association In Opposition to:
LD 287: An Act To Require Electronic Benefits Transfer Cards To Be Printed with the Beneficiary's
Photograph**

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Room 220, Cross State Office Building
Tuesday, March 23, 2021

Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association. I am here today in opposition to LD 287: "An Act To Require Electronic Benefits Transfer Cards To Be Printed with the Beneficiary's Photograph."

MPHA is the state's oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 500 individual members and 30 organizations across the state. The mission of MPHA is to improve and sustain the health and well-being of all people in Maine through health promotion, disease prevention, and the advancement of health equity. As a statewide nonprofit association, we advocate, act, and advise on critical public health challenges, aiming to improve the policies, systems, and environments that underlie health inequities – but which also have potential to improve health outcomes for all people in Maine. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine's communities and we take that responsibility seriously.

This bill removes the requirement that a recipient of an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card must agree in writing for the Commissioner of Health and Human Services to place a photograph of the recipient on the card. In other words, all recipients, even minors, would need to have a photograph on their EBT card. For minors, the photograph would be of their parent or legal guardian.

MPHA is in strong opposition to this bill.

EBT cards are often issued to households rather than individuals, which means the photograph on the card may not match the person using it to make a purchase. While federal rules confirm all household members have the right to use the card, and it is illegal to deny a purchase if the photo ID does not match the person presenting the card, it is still possible the user would be denied their purchase if the photo does not match the individual. Not only would this denial be illegal and discriminatory; it would also mean families would not have access to needed benefits to purchase food for their households.

Furthermore, retailers cannot treat recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) differently than other non-SNAP recipients, so unless the store's policy is to check identification of all debit and credit card users, it would be discriminatory for them to only check the identification of EBT card users.

In addition to these concerns, some individuals and families may experience barriers to adding a photo to their EBT card, including persons experiencing homelessness, older adults, persons with disabilities, victims of domestic

violence, people who oppose having their photo taken due to religious or cultural beliefs, and others who cannot travel to a local DHHS office, such as due to work restrictions, and lack of childcare or transportation.

There is no conclusive evidence that adding photographs to EBT cards decreases fraud, and in fact, research suggests the cost of fraud prevention through photo ID requirements outweighs the savings gained by fraud prevention.¹ Furthermore, the United States Department of Agriculture issued guidance that states that require photo IDs are still required to issue an EBT card to expedited applicants without delay; and not deny or withhold SNAP to an entire household if the head of household does not comply with photograph policy [7 C.F.R. 273.8\(f\)\(5\)](#); [7 C.F.R. 274.8\(f\)\(7\)](#).

We believe this bill will reduce access to needed benefits for low-income individuals and families, and in practice, it would be illegal for stores to deny grocery purchases if the photo ID does not match the card user. In addition to lacking evidence that such a policy proposal would reduce fraud, these types of “policies augment an intricate web of institutional discrimination to shape the social conditions and health of multiple marginalized communities.”²

In sum, we believe this bill would further health *inequities*, and worsen health outcomes for low-income individuals and families in Maine. Thus, Maine Public Health Association strongly opposes LD 287, and we respectfully ask you to vote “Ought Not to Pass.” Thank you.

¹ Mills GB & Lowenstein C. Assessing the merits of photo EBT cards in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. *Urban Institute*, 2015. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/assessing-merits-photo-ebt-cards-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program>.

² LeBron AMW, Lopez WD, Cowan K, Novak NL, Temrowski O, Ibarra-Frayre M & Delva J. Restrictive ID policies: Implications for health equity. *J Immigr Minor Health*. 2018; 20(2): 255–260.