

March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021

Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Izzy Ostrowski, and I'm the Maine Hunger Initiative Social Change Advocate at Preble Street, a human services anti-poverty agency with over a dozen programs and services provided across the state. I am here today to testify in opposition to LD 287: An Act to Require Electronic Benefits Transfer Cards to Be Printed with the Beneficiary's Photograph.

Maine is facing a hunger crisis. Now, more than ever, people are struggling to make ends meet and purchase nutritious food for themselves and, for many, their families. This is reflected by the one million meals that Preble Street served in 2020 and the long lines outside of our food pantry. With food insecurity affecting 1 in 8 adults and 1 in 5 children in Maine, we should be ensuring that SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) is accessible. If this bill were to pass, however, the result would be the complete opposite.

This bill would create additional barriers for people who utilize EBT cards for various services. It would create barriers for caregivers who assist people receiving public benefits, making it difficult, if not impossible, for them to shop on their behalf. Further, many benefits are allocated per household, not per person, which means that more than one person may use the EBT card to shop for their family.

EBT cards printed with the beneficiary's photograph will only add to the stigma and shame that many folks are already subjected to for utilizing SNAP. To quote an advocate with Homeless Voices for Justice: "To ask people for proof of ID simply to get the food they need adds to all other stigmas that exist when you are poor and having to use social services. People don't have to show an ID when using a debit card, why should a poor person be singled out simply for needing and using an EBT card?"

A resident of Portland who appreciates the anonymity of the current EBT card remarked on how anxious he felt when he first used SNAP. He kept thinking that everyone was going to be looking at him, judging him, and getting frustrated because he was holding up the line. He was glad that the EBT card looked like a regular debit card, because he didn't feel as singled out for needing assistance in order to put food in his refrigerator and cupboards. For this reason, he said it was important that people who struggle to get by need a system that works with them and not against them. Mainers deserve a system that works with them and provides accessible services which is why photo IDs should not be printed on EBT cards.

A Mainer who has utilized SNAP and remarked on the positive transition from paper stamps to a plastic card, said that having to show an ID on an EBT card would be like going backwards. Maine doesn't have time to move backwards and, while we sit here today, there are thousands of Mainers who are wondering where their next meal will come from. Why add another burden to people who are already carrying a full load? Preble Street respectfully asks you to vote against this bill and prioritize the importance of Mainers accessing food with dignity and respect.

Thank you for your time.