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P.O. Box 5234, 77 Sewall Street, Suite 3000 • Augusta, Maine 04332

Telephone (207) 622-4461 • Facsimile (207) 622-9732

mainegrocers@mainegrocers.org • www.mainegrocers.org

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**Testimony in Opposition to
LD 1411 Resolve, To Require the Department of Health and Human Services To
Request a Waiver To Prohibit the Use of Food Supplement Benefits
for the Purchase of Taxable Food Items**

Senator Craven, Representative Farnsworth and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Shelley Doak. I am the Executive Director of the Maine Grocers Association. I am speaking in opposition to LD 1411.

The Maine Grocers Association is a membership organization representing independently owned and operated grocery stores, supermarkets, wholesalers, distributors, grocery product manufacturers and other businesses supporting Maine's grocery industry.

I would like to thank the Administration for discussing their proposal with us and thank them for recognizing the importance of healthy eating by food stamp recipients. To that end, we can all agree that the Supplemental Food Assistance Program (SNAP) is designed as a safety net to help low-income people buy the food they need to feed their families. The Program is governed by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (USDA) and is administered here in Maine through the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Family Independence.

While I appreciate that the Administration is merely seeking your endorsement of their right to request a waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, federal rules restrict treating SNAP participants differently from other customers. Singling out SNAP clients by prohibiting them from buying certain food items conflicts with Federal regulations 7CFR 271.2, which defines eligible food as any food or food products intended for human consumption except alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and hot foods and hot food products prepared for immediate consumption. Any deviation to deny benefits to a household member or authorized representative would violate both the letter and spirit of SNAP law.

On behalf of the grocery retail and wholesale community and the families we feed in communities across our state every day, we take great efforts to educate our customers on the importance of good nutrition and healthy eating. Our members have long been the government's partner in ensuring SNAP program participants have steady access to their food assistance benefits and follow the federal standards. Equally important is that we ensure that our SNAP customers are treated the same as all other customers who shop in our stores. Limitations to foods that qualify for purchase under the SNAP program would reintroduce stigma back into the program; stigma that the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) has helped eliminate over the years.

Should new limitations be imposed upon the SNAP program, it would likely lead to customer confusion at the checkout. It would also require new cashier training across our industry, and would increase compliance burdens and enforcement for both retailers and the USDA. If certain foods were restricted from purchase in the program, it would also be difficult for retailers to update and re-program their point-of-sale equipment. If certain foods were restricted, there would need to be a central source for identifying, and keeping up to date, a list of products that were prohibited from purchase under the program. This could pose a significant challenge because food products in the marketplace are constantly changing, and determining how to set-up and maintain the list, and who will be in charge of it, would be a challenge. Finally, should the USDA ever allow a state to prohibit certain food items, it would be a step back from the current interoperability of the SNAP program where SNAP customers can expect the same treatment in any part of the country.

As essential partners in the delivery of SNAP benefits, we strongly support the streamlined and efficient system under which the SNAP program operates today. We urge to vote against LD 1141.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.