

April 3, 2019

Good morning Senator Bellows, Representative Sylvester, and members of the committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Heather Zimmerman and I am the Advocacy Director at Preble Street. I am writing to testify in support of LD 1324, Resolve, To Establish the Committee To Study the Feasibility of Creating Basic Income Security.

The mission of Preble Street is to provide accessible barrier-free services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty, and to advocate for solutions to these problems.

Every day, Preble Street provides services to people who are struggling with hunger, poverty, and homelessness. These problems – and their resulting trauma - are the result of an unequal economic system that is failing Maine people. The people we serve are some of our community's most resilient, hard-working people—but also our community's most vulnerable. Many are working with Preble Street to navigate complex social welfare programs with long application processes, wait times, strict eligibility requirements, and yet there are remaining gaps in the system. Current programs, policies, and wages are leaving too many people in our communities behind—but basic income security would take an important step to address the unequal economic system.

Basic income security would provide an important support and buffer for the people we serve. It would mean the difference between eating and going hungry for people who run out of SNAP benefits midway through the month. It would mean saving up for a security deposit for people who are experiencing homelessness. It would mean being able to go to the doctor about a health concern that has been put on the back-burner because people don't have money or adequate insurance to cover preventative care. It would mean being able to afford childcare so people can get back to work or go to school to increase their skills. Unconditional cash assistance could mean any number of things for the people we serve, but most importantly basic income security has the potential to lift more Mainers out of poverty—something we all strive for in our work.

Here in Maine, more than one-third (36%) of people have no money in savings at all, and more than half of residents (52%) have less than \$1,000 in savings.ⁱ This means a majority of Mainers are one stumble away from catastrophe.

More than 47% of Maine SNAP recipients live in working householdsⁱⁱ where the wages don't go far enough to provide food for the family. Clearly, the wages Mainers are earning are not enough to provide financial security and many are barely scraping by. Basic income security could provide a needed cushion for people who are living paycheck to paycheck, who are working harder than ever but are still struggling to make ends meet.

At Preble Street, we believe that everyone has the right to meet their basic needs and pursue their full potential in life. However, every day we see people who are trying hard to meet their basic needs and survive, and yet keep meeting roadblocks along the way. We believe that studying the feasibility of providing basic income security and strengthening the earned income tax credit are important steps toward realizing the potential of Maine's people and we are eager to see the

recommendations of the committee that would be formed by the passage of LD 1324. For these reasons, we urge you to support LD 1324. Thank you.

ⁱ <https://www.gobankingrates.com/saving-money/budgeting/americans-savings-state/#21>

ⁱⁱ https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_maine.pdf