



MOFGA Testimony In Support Of

LD 234 - An Act to Raise from 12 to 24 the Annual Limit on the Number of Public Events and Meals Nonprofit Organizations May Have That Are Exempt from Certain Rules and Regulations

February 9, 2023

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Heather Spalding and I am deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). I am speaking today in support of LD 234 - *An Act to Raise from 12 to 24 the Annual Limit on the Number of Public Events and Meals Nonprofit Organizations May Have That Are Exempt from Certain Rules and Regulations*.

Our organization started in 1971 and is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. We're a broad-based community that educates about and advocates for organic agriculture, illuminating its interdependence with a healthy environment, local food production, and thriving communities. We have 15,000 members, we certify more than 500 organic farms and processing facilities representing \$90 million in sales, and we are working hard to provide training and create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers.

Recognizing the urgency of educating and adopting sustainable food production in an increasingly fragile world, we are working to create a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us. Collectively we face the challenges of climate change, food insecurity, rising rates of obesity, diabetes and other serious diseases, polluted soil, air and water, declining rural economies, and inequitable systems. Through education, training and advocacy, we are helping farmers thrive, making more local, organic food available and building sustainable communities. Since the earliest days of our organization, our broad base of supporters have come together to share experiences, challenges, accomplishments and opportunities – and almost always that happens over food. Our gatherings are open to the public and we have developed an event food policy that prioritizes local, organic foods and minimizes waste.

Many of our events happen at our Common Ground Education Center in the towns of Unity and Thorndike, where we have a licensed commercial kitchen and offer cooking and food safety classes in addition to hosting countless educational workshops and committee meetings. We think the events that we host at our headquarters would not pertain to this law. However, we also occasionally provide food at gatherings at farms, businesses, granges, schools, other non-profits' offices, and other institutions, and we want to be sure that we are compliant with state law. This bill brought to our attention that there is a limit on the number of gatherings and we are worried that it might have an impact on our mission critical events. We are curious about the history of this law and the impetus for it. Why 12? Why 24? Why are some organizations exempt and others not? We support the increase but hope to understand the reason for the law and also whether there is another approach that could help organizations come into compliance without an arbitrary number limiting events.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this bill. I would be happy to answer questions.

