

March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021

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

My name is Izzy Ostrowski, and I'm the 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 support of LD 727: Resolve, To Ensure the Health and Wellness of Older Residents of the State.

The Preble Street Maine Hunger Initiative works to increase access to USDA federal nutrition programs like SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and advocates for long-term solutions to end hunger in Maine. Over the past year, there has been a dramatic rise of food insecurity in Maine, a problem that was already extreme before the Covid-19 pandemic. Preble Street served one million meals in 2020- a massive increase from the yearly average of 625,000 meals served in years prior.

Maine is currently facing a hunger crisis and has a significantly higher rate of hunger than the national average. A report titled "[The State of Poverty in Maine, 2021](#)"\* stated that 1 in 8 adults, including 1 in 5 children, experience food insecurity yearly in Maine. This crisis is dire and threatens every community across Maine with Black, Indigenous, and people of color experiencing higher rates of food insecurity and hunger.

SNAP is our state's most effective and efficient anti-hunger program. The SNAP program helps people access the food they need to stay active and healthy while helping to lift people out of poverty and transition to self-sufficiency. Additionally, SNAP benefits entire communities by profiting food retailers and the state economy. Every \$5 in SNAP benefits generates \$9 in economic activity and SNAP brings more than \$250 million dollars into the Maine economy annually.

This bill would provide crucial steps for mitigating Maine's hunger epidemic by increasing access to SNAP for some of Maine's most vulnerable populations. Removing the asset test for older Mainers and people with disabilities is a common-sense policy that can reduce hunger in Maine. When Maine reinstated these asset tests in 2015, it caused more than 8,000 people to lose SNAP. The asset test punishes Mainers who have modest savings for other essential costs associated with housing and well-being by causing them to lose SNAP although they experience hunger.

For example, a 70-year-old man from Oxford county lost his SNAP benefits because he owns two old and unreliable cars. He is lucky if he can get one car running and on the road. He alternates between the two cars and tries to scrounge up enough money to fix one car to get it on the road, but before he knows it something else needs fixing. Because he owns two cars, he lost access to SNAP. This man used his SNAP benefits to buy things he can't get at the food

pantry like fresh vegetables and meat. Now he is forced to rely on the pantry for his food needs.

Preble Street provides emergency food to people who vary in age, life experiences, and assets. Veterans throughout the state receive food through our Veterans Housing Services program. Emergency food boxes are prepared and distributed by case managers and other agencies, and people line up outside of Preble Street's food pantry to receive food boxes. What is the underlying connection here? All of these people are food insecure and they all need better access to SNAP. Therefore, the language of this bill should be amended to eliminate the asset test for all.

When Mainers have access to nutritious food, our communities thrive and grow. When our neighbors struggle with hunger, the impact on our state is dire and far reaching. Preble Street urges you to vote in support of this bill as an act to support addressing the state's hunger crisis, thank you for your consideration.

\*["The State of Poverty in Maine, 2021"](#) Prepared by Maine Equal Justice

[https://maineequaljustice.org/site/assets/files/2284/stateofpovertyinmaine8\\_5x11\\_1-4-21.pdf](https://maineequaljustice.org/site/assets/files/2284/stateofpovertyinmaine8_5x11_1-4-21.pdf)