



**Written Testimony of Jessica Maurer on Behalf of  
the Maine Council on Aging  
To Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and  
Forestry**

**In Favor of LD 786 -- "An Act To Reduce Hunger and Promote  
Maine Agriculture"**

Delivered in writing on April 2, 2019

Greetings Senator Dill, Representative Hickman and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry:

My name is Jess Maurer and I'm the Executive Director of the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of more than 80 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and community members working together to make sure we all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age in our homes and communities. I am testifying in favor of LD 786.

Maine's statewide hunger relief network is a critical component to reducing hunger in our state. This network provides crucial food assistance to tens of thousands of older Mainers who live at or near poverty and struggle to gain access to the food they need. LD 786 would provide much-needed funding to essential food assistance services.

Maine is ranked as the 9th most food insecure state in the nation and 12th most food insecure state for older adults. Since 2010, the rate of senior hunger in Maine has more than doubled, rising from 7.3% in 2010 to 16% in 2017. This means that one in six older Mainers is unable to access the food assistance they need.

There are targeted food assistance programs that serve older Mainers, like the Senior Commodity Supplemental Food Program that provides 3,000 low-income people over the age of 60 with food on a monthly basis, and the Meals on Wheels program that provides home delivered meals to nearly 5,000 people over 60 who are homebound and unable to prepare a meal on their own. Many older people who struggle with hunger do not qualify for these programs or are confronted by waitlists for them.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.basiceconomicsecurity.org/EI/location.aspx>

The Elder Economic Security Index finds that a Maine person age 65 and older living in a home she owns without a mortgage needs \$20,500 in income to *meet her basic needs*. A couple needs \$31,400. Nearly a third of the 250,000 Mainers age 65 and older live on Social Security as their only source of income. The average Social Security income in Maine is just under \$14,000. So, about 75,000 older Mainers don't have enough income to meet their basic needs.

Older adults living on fixed incomes are forced to choose between purchasing food and paying for other essentials such as medication, housing, and utilities. During the winter months, the "heat or eat" dilemma is especially acute for older Mainers – thousands are asking, do I heat my home or buy food? Still, others are asking throughout the year, do I buy my medications or buy food? These are devastating choices to make that no person should be forced to make.

Food insecurity is a serious health concern for older Mainers. Aside from malnutrition, food insecurity can increase an older adult's risk for frailty, deteriorating health conditions, and disability compared to their counterparts who have a healthy diet. It is estimated that, for older adults, being food insecure is equivalent to being 14 years older. Older Americans who struggle with hunger are 60% more likely to be depressed, 53% more likely to have a heart attack, and 40% more likely to have congestive heart failure.

Good Shepherd Food Bank and its 400 local partner organizations are serving older Mainers across the entire state. 40% of households served by the Food Bank's network have at least one older adult in the home. Investing in Good Shepherd Food Bank and its local partners is an investment in the health of older Mainers.

Any state strategy aimed at ensuring the health of our older population needs to encompass hunger-relief strategies. This legislation provides the state with the opportunity to care for Mainers by investing in a proven and effective network of service providers. We urge you to support LD 786.

Thank you.

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