

LD 263 Written Testimony
Public Hearing- Thursday April 27, 2017

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Heather Healy Stevens, a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist from Eliot, Maine. I work as a Public Health Analyst in federal government, for the Health Resources and Services Administration in the Bureau of Health Workforce. I am writing on behalf of the Maine Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (MAND), an organization of dietetic professionals who are the food and nutrition experts who translate Nutrition and Dietetics, a professional association with over 100,000 members. MAND members work throughout the state in hospitals, schools, public health clinics, nursing homes, food management, universities, research, and private practice. We are advocates for advancing the nutritional status of Mainers, Americans, and people around the world. We strive to improve the health of Maine's citizens through quality food and nutrition information and services.

On behalf of MAND, I write in support of LD 263 — An Act To Provide Additional Assistance for the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities Receiving Food Supplement Program Benefits. Specifically, this bill will increase the minimum SNAP benefit for seniors from \$16 to \$30 per month.

The nutrition assistance offered by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is important for all beneficiaries, but this benefit is especially critical for lower income older adults and people with disabilities, who often live on fixed budgets that can force them to make difficult trade-offs that affect their health. Research shows that households that receive SNAP benefits are less likely to experience food insecurity. Which means recipients are less likely to lack access to enough nutritious food for a healthy, active lifestyle. Food insecurity is associated with adverse health outcomes in seniors. Food insecure seniors are 50% more likely to have diabetes, 14% more likely to have high blood pressure and nearly 60% more likely to have congestive heart failure or have experienced a heart attack.

Fourteen percent of Maine seniors are food insecure. Food insecurity leads to malnutrition, which is under-addressed and costly to the U.S. health system. One out of two older adults are at risk for malnutrition and disease-associated malnutrition costs are estimated at \$51.3 billion dollars annually. Malnutrition in older adults increases the length of hospital stays by four to six days, and up to 60% of hospitalized older adults may be malnourished. Nineteen percent of Maine's population is over 65 years of age, by 2030 this will swell to 28%, almost one-third of Maine's population. Disease prevention and health maintenance through good nutrition for the aging population therefore provides an opportunity to contain health care costs in addition to improving quality of life. Better nutrition and physical and

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mental activity can prevent chronic diseases. Increasing the SNAP benefits for Maine seniors reduces food insecurity by increasing a senior's food budget. SNAP Education (also known as SNAP-Ed), provided in Maine by qualified professionals, will help to ensure that these increased benefits are used to purchase nutritious foods. On behalf of MAND, I urge you to support LD 263.

References:

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