



Maureen Fitzgerald Terry

9 Lombard Street
Gorham, ME 04038
Cell Phone: 712-9735
Maureen.Terry@legislature.maine.gov

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

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Testimony of Rep. Maureen Terry

**L.D. 1046, An Act To Create an Income Tax Return Checkoff for Hunger Prevention
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation**

Senator Chipman and fellow members of the Taxation Committee, I am Representative Mo Terry and I represent the people of District 26 in Gorham. I am here today to present **L.D. 1046, An Act To Create an Income Tax Return Checkoff for Hunger Prevention**.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated so many existing needs over the course of the past year and several months. Even before the pandemic hit, a 2019 [report](#) by the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that 13.6 percent of Maine households are food insecure – a rate far higher than the national average of 11.7 percent. More than 170,000 Mainers cannot access enough healthy food on a day-to-day basis each year. One in five children regularly struggle with hunger. Here in Maine we have numerous organizations working hard to end hunger but with this need as acute as it is, and having only been made worse by the pandemic, we must take action anywhere possible to assist their efforts.

LD 1046 provides a tax mechanism to do just that. This bill would require the inclusion of a checkoff provision on Maine income tax forms for taxpayers who are able and who wish to contribute to support the emergency food assistance program administered by the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF). It also establishes the Emergency Food Assistance Program Fund, to which revenue collected from the income tax checkoff is credited. The fund would fill in grants for all kinds of food pantries and community hunger prevention programs around the state like Good Shepard Food Bank, Midcoast Hunger Prevention Program, Wayside Food Programs and so many others.

The fund would enable food banks to beef up their supply for clients so that folks can choose what foods best fit their needs and the needs of their families. This option is a local and voluntary solution to an urgent problem. Housing the fund under the DACF food assistance program is crucial because that program works with organizations, food banks and churches on the ground in our communities and truly understands their specific needs. It allows these funds to be appropriately targeted so this money will deliver the greatest benefit possible.

LD 1046 presents an immediate way for folks to give back what they can to help neighbors facing insecurity during these especially difficult times. Hunger and food insecurity carries an

immense stigma. It's not something we typically like to talk about. Especially if you're experiencing it for the first time like so many Mainers this year. To me, this checkoff option is just like making dinner for a sick friend or community member in need of a little extra TLC. It provides a way for more of our neighbors experiencing food insecurity to access meals without all of the added stress and fear often associated with asking for help.

Ultimately, this bill is a way to address a deeply felt need in Maine right now and it does so by encouraging folks to donate what extra they have to help one another out. This will go a long way towards ending food insecurity in our state. It will help people eat. As someone who feeds people for a living, there isn't a better act of kindness or expression of love than making sure your friends and neighbors are fed.

So with that, I thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.