

PRESS RELEASE

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Maine Anti-hunger Advocates Applaud Congress' Passage of Bipartisan Farm Bill that Protects Food Assistance

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program helps one in seven Mainers keep food on the table

PORTLAND, ME (December 13, 2018) — On Wednesday, December 12 the House voted 369-47 to pass a bipartisan Farm Bill, following the Senate's 87-13 vote to pass the bill Tuesday. Preble Street, Maine Equal Justice, and Good Shepherd Food Bank join together to commend Maine's Congressional delegation in voting to pass the bipartisan compromise, which protects the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and invests in The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). These are vital programs that help millions of Americans put food on the table every day.

"The bipartisan Farm Bill agreement passed by the Senate yesterday confirms what millions of people across the country know to be true: SNAP reduces hunger and poverty. Protecting and strengthening SNAP is the right way forward," said Donna Yellen, Acting Executive Director of Preble Street. "We are grateful that Senators Susan Collins and Angus King and Representatives Chellie Pingree and Bruce Poliquin all voted for this Farm Bill agreement to ensure Mainers have access to nutritious food."

In communities across our state, thousands of our neighbors struggle to access the food they need. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nearly 15 percent of Maine households are food insecure, meaning they lack access to enough nutritious food.

Last year, Preble Street served over 600,000 meals through its three soup kitchens, food pantry, and emergency food boxes. Good Shepherd Food Bank, through its statewide network of local hunger relief partners, distributed 25 million meals in the past year to combat hunger in Maine. While the efforts of the charitable hunger relief sector are vital, they cannot solve hunger on their own. It is estimated that for every meal provided by a food pantry or soup kitchen in this country, SNAP provides 12 meals.

SNAP is the most effective anti-hunger program in Maine and the country. In 2017, SNAP helped 180,000 Mainers by providing access to nutritious food and the opportunity to shop for food with dignity. This Farm Bill ensures SNAP continues to feed families with children, seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, and many working people who are in jobs with low wages or inconsistent hours.

"The bill Congress has passed left out harmful proposals to add so-called 'work requirements' to the SNAP program, a policy which has been road-tested in Maine and simply made very low-income Mainers hungrier, without helping them get jobs," said Kathy Kilrain del Rio, a policy analyst with Maine Equal Justice. "Maine people have said loud and clear that SNAP works and that Congress should

continue to support it, and we're deeply grateful that the entire delegation has reflected those messages in this vote."

As the Farm Bill debate took place throughout the past year, it was clear to advocates and service providers in Maine that the emergency food system would not be able to make up for the cuts and harmful changes to SNAP being proposed by House Republicans. Were those changes to become law, potentially tens of thousands of Mainers would have lost access to the crucial food assistance they need to make ends meet. We are grateful this final Farm Bill agreement rejected damaging changes and will maintain a strong SNAP program that provides a lifeline for Mainers struggling with hunger.

The final bill also invests in TEFAP, said Clara McConnell, Director of Public Affairs at Good Shepherd Food Bank. "This program provides nutritious food to food banks and local hunger relief organizations across the country, so they can care for people facing hunger in their community. This funding increase will help the charitable hunger relief sector provide even more meals to the people in need in the coming years."

With this responsible bipartisan bill, SNAP will help keep food on the table for the one in seven Mainers. Preble Street, Maine Equal Justice, and Good Shepherd Food Bank applaud our Congressional delegation for supporting this bill and protecting this critical tool in our efforts to end food insecurity and hunger in Maine.

Preble Street is a nonprofit human service agency serving the most vulnerable people in Maine since 1975 through innovative, best-practice, client-centered programs that respond to and prevent hunger and homelessness. In addition to the largest emergency food service program in northern New England, Preble Street operates 13 low-barrier programs throughout Maine providing 24/365 services for individuals and families living in poverty, including homeless youth, women, veterans, and victims of human trafficking, driven by its mission to meet urgent needs, empower people to move beyond the crises in their lives, and advocate for solutions to homelessness, hunger, and poverty. www.preblestreet.org

Good Shepherd Food Bank is the largest hunger relief organization in Maine, which provides for Mainers facing hunger by distributing nutritious food to more than 400 partner agencies across the state, including food pantries, meal sites, schools, and senior programs. Together with its network, the Food Bank contributes to a statewide effort to combat the root causes of hunger by engaging in advocacy, nutrition education, targeted interventions, and strategic partnerships. In 2018, the Food Bank has distributed 25 million meals to families, children, and seniors in need throughout Maine. www.feedingmaine.org

Maine Equal Justice is a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. www.mejp.org

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