



March 8th, 2022

Good morning, Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing,

My name is Izzy Ostrowski, and I am 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 submitting testimony in support of LD 2006: An Act To Improve the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

Maine is experiencing a hunger and housing crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated issues of homelessness, housing insecurity, and food insecurity for individuals and families. In our programs, we have seen a stark increase in people accessing emergency shelter, prepared meals, and assistance from our food pantry. In 2020 and 2021, Preble Street served one million meals each year - a massive increase from the previous yearly average of 625,000 meals. Now more than ever, people are struggling to make ends meet and purchase food for themselves and, for many, their families. Maine ranks fifth in the nation for the highest levels of food insecurity¹ and we must ensure that individuals and families do not have to decide between paying rent, heating their homes, or putting food on the table.

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a valuable and much-needed resource. According to 2021 national data, one in three U.S. households could not pay for household energy use, and Black households, Indigenous households, and households of color were disproportionately impacted by utility and heating shutoffs². Poverty is intersectional, and many individuals and families navigating heating costs and housing insecurity are also experiencing food insecurity. LIHEAP is inextricably linked to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the ability for SNAP recipients to receive support with heating assistance and increased food supplement benefits.

Last week, Massachusetts announced that it will provide increased SNAP benefits and heating assistance for low-income households to reflect increased utility costs³. Massachusetts's push to connect individuals and families with LIHEAP and, thus, increased

¹ [Fighting hunger in Maine | Wiscasset Newspaper](#)

² [Heat or eat? America's poor face an inhumane, impossible choice this winter. \(msn.com\)](#)
[How Home Weatherization Can Fix Heating Costs - Anti-Racism Daily \(the-ard.com\)](#)

³ [Massachusetts Provides Increased SNAP Benefits and Heating Assistance for Low-Income Households | Mass.gov](#)

SNAP benefits reflects an effort to help thousands of households put food on the table, heat their homes, and meet their basic needs.

Maine now has the opportunity to invest in LIHEAP and make it more accessible by improving application waiting and approval times. This is a critical step in ensuring that our community members most impacted by the rising cost of food and utilities, receive adequate and accessible support. Ending hunger and housing insecurity requires robust investments in federal nutrition programs, housing, healthcare, and other factors that impact overall wellbeing. With the dramatic increase of home heating oil and utility prices in the past week, passing this legislation is more critical than ever. For this reason, Preble Street urges you to vote in support of this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.