

November 22, 2019

To Members of the Basic Income Security Committee,

My name is Larry Dansinger, and I live in Bangor. I think the goal that every person living in Maine should have basic income and economic security is crucial in addressing various issues that face our state. These include reducing poverty, addressing automation and a lack of jobs in the future, and the topic I want to focus on, shrinking economic inequality.

Reducing inequality is not the same as having basic economic security, but there is a strong connection. Inequality creates feelings of a lack of self-worth in those who are not doing as well financially as others.

As a result, they might overuse alcohol and legal/illegal drugs. Inequality might affect their mental health, or their family relationships, or how they raise kids, or their stress levels and health. It might reduce their interest in being civic minded, or becoming entrepreneurs, or discouraging them from seeking higher education or other kinds of self-improvement. If there's not much chance of doing a lot better and having income security, why try?

When we compare the United States to other "developed" countries in Europe and Japan, Australia, and Canada, that are not as economically unequal, most other countries do better than the US on many factors—life expectancy, teen pregnancies, crime rates, social mobility, literacy rates/academic scores, and even how much a person trusts their neighbor. There's a correlation between these factors and economic inequality and less Basic Income Security. And, many believe inequality is a contributing cause of these problems too.

There are benefits from reducing economic inequality and insuring Basic Income Security:

- \*More tax money that could go into the Maine treasury to be spent or saved
- \*Lower costs for substance use disorder and mental health programs, MaineCare and other health expenses, school programs for special needs students, TANF and other income security programs, jails and prisons, and many other social and community services
- \*A robust economy with many more small and medium size businesses successfully providing products and services to Mainers
- \*More people, especially young, staying in Maine or coming to live here
- \*More affordable housing stock
- \*More attention to a clean environment and addressing the climate emergency
- \*Bringing the two Maines (south and north) closer together
- \*More happiness and security for all residents, whether wealthy or low income.

So, if inequality hurts all Maine people and reducing it could bring us toward "the way life should be," then I hope we can use direct cash payments to move Maine closer to having basic income security for all of us living in this state.

Larry Dansinger, (207) 262-3706, [larryd@myfairpoint.net](mailto:larryd@myfairpoint.net)

To Members of the Basic Income Security Committee:

My name is Sunny, and I live in Bangor. My background is in community organizing and climate justice. I volunteer for and support Andrew Yang for President in 2020 largely because of his vision of a universal basic income for all American adults throughout their lifetimes. I believe that this vision for a universal basic income - of the government ensuring that no family is left behind and that no one's income starts at zero - is crucial.

We've seen how much a basic income can improve lives. In Manitoba, Canada in the mid-1970s, the "Mincome" experiment showed increased rates of high school graduation in the children of families who received the basic income. The only groups who worked less after receiving basic income than before were new mothers, high school students, and college students. In Finland, the basic income experiment that ended in 2018 showed that recipients were more likely to trust the government and others and engage more in society. We're seeing positive trends at home, as well - the conservative state of Alaska has had a basic income for over 40 years. During this time the Alaskan wealth gap decreased; Alaska now has one of the most even income distributions in the country and is the only American state with a basic income.

The demands of the 21st century are shifting, and automation will lead to a changing workforce. People must get educated for the jobs of the future, even those who are well into their careers. Mainers are much more likely to go back to school or further their education if they are not forgoing any and all income. As a state, we need to be ahead of the curve when it comes to solving these problems. We must encourage entrepreneurship and innovation, and we have to set up a system where people can seek out non-traditional paths while still having their most basic needs met. Young Mainers are leaving because they see the potential for financial security in other places, but, unfortunately, not at home. This must change.

We also need to recognize that almost half of the children that live in Maine are in low-income families. We must set our children up for success, and putting money into the families' hands will do just that. The problems of poverty have run rampant in this country. The late great Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was an advocate of a basic income and said that the most effective way to eradicate poverty is by literally putting money into people's hands. A basic income is exactly what he was fighting for on the day he was assassinated.

Women will be most empowered by a basic income. There are many stay-at-home moms who rely solely on their partner to meet their financial needs. Basic income will give women more autonomy and ability to care for their children and to care for themselves. Basic income also values people who are differently-abled or unable to work, people who perform care work, and artists. Providing this income for all Mainers will recognize unpaid work that is done, and allow people to partake in more meaningful work. People will work more to improve their own lives and the world around them. The best part is that most of the money that goes into basic income for Mainers will be invested right back into our own communities, to make them more vibrant

and help them grow. Basic income also serves as a form of insurance for people when times get tough so that the floor doesn't fall out from under their feet. The case for a basic income is less about the money and more about the decision: what kind of society do we want to live in?

The last point I want to touch on is perhaps the most important. Basic income, when guaranteed throughout a person's life, does something incredibly powerful: it allows people to build wealth. There is a life expectancy gap between people with wealth and without - almost 20 years between the richest and poorest Americans. This makes sense when you think about what money allows you to access. Financial stability allows you to access quality food, healthcare, better environmental circumstances but also decreases things like stress and anxiety levels. If we don't institute a basic income, we won't be able to close this wealth gap or this life expectancy gap, and they both are predicted to grow in the coming decades. This basic income is an amazing opportunity to take care of our fellow Mainers, take pride in the fact that our government cares for us and values us, and show the rest of the country how forward-thinking we are. No matter what, basic income has to be part of the plan going forward; now, it is only a matter of how soon it's implemented.