

Committee To Study the Feasibility of Creating Basic Income Security  
October 15, 2020 Meeting  
Summary of Testimony

1. Ann Danforth, Maine Equal Justice

- Maine Equal Justice is a civil legal services organization that works with people with low-income seeking solutions to poverty through policy, education and legal representation.
- COVID-19 has made it all too clear that our economy and governmental systems are failing many low-income Mainers, particularly residents who are Black, indigenous and people of color.
- Some federal supports in the form of \$1,200 stimulus payments and an extra \$600 in federal unemployment insurance have helped Mainers at a critical time.
- The current system for obtaining public assistance, while a lifeline for many, is deeply flawed. It is stressful, dehumanizing and time-consuming.
- Income solutions should target racial and economic inequities.
- Both studies and, more importantly, people in poverty indicate that cash is the most direct and effective way to provide financial stability to those who need it most.
- Raising the income floor for Maine people will help lift people out of poverty, shrink economic inequality, and work to stabilize Maine's economy.

2. Craig Lapine, Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

- LD 1159, Resolve, To End Hunger in Maine by 2030 was passed by the Maine Legislature in 2019 (1<sup>st</sup> Regular, 129<sup>th</sup> Maine Legislature).
- Resolve 2019, chapter 32 directs the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (ACF), in consultation and collaboration with interested parties and stakeholders, to collaborate with the Departments of Marine Resources; Inland Fisheries and Wildlife; Health and Human Services; Labor; Economic and Community Development; Education; and Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management, Bureau of Veterans' Services and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension to develop a comprehensive strategic plan to eliminate hunger in Maine by 2030.
- The Department of ACF submitted an initial design for the plan in February 2020

3. Dee Clarke, resident of Portland, Maine

- I raised my three children working part-time, going to trade and certificate schools and receiving TANF. My children and I had two experiences of being in a [homeless] shelter. Between a mental breakdown and partial hospitalization where I was finally diagnosed with mental illness, I ended up receiving SSI [supplemental security income].
- Today, I receive a monthly cash benefit SSI and SDI totaling \$803. I also receive food stamps and MaineCare. My MaineCare pays for all my prescriptions and I rarely have a co-pay. I live in a tax credit unit with a Section-8 voucher.
- Cash benefits are an important resource for those in poverty.
- The study committee must consider real time, real life, not paper, statistics and data.

4. Elizabeth Capone-Henriquez, resident of Portland, Maine

- “Tedious” best describes systems that support poor people. The systems are often dehumanizing and demoralizing. It would be better if we could help people in a more straightforward way.
- Emergency housing is an issue and transportation is often a barrier.
- People don’t know how to access general assistance; we need a public education campaign. Complex information buried in various websites creates a barrier.

5. Larry Dansinger, resident of Bangor

- The current pandemic Maine and the country are facing has brought into sharp focus the need for basic income security for every resident. The \$1,200 stimulus payment, increased unemployment benefits and proposals for a second stimulus and other payments have clearly demonstrated the need for ongoing basic income security.
- One-time or short-term cash payments help, but only regular cash payments can maintain and strength the economy and all Maine communities.
- Many Mainers experience stress, which can cause domestic violence, parenting difficulties, mental health problems and substance use disorders, physical health issues, interactions with the criminal justice system and other problems that cost the State large amounts of money.
- The first step for Maine, through its legislature-sponsored Basic Income Security Study Committee, can be to endorse the value and necessity of such payments without immediately trying to fill in the details of such a program.
- A second action the study committee can take is to ask for funding (from the Legislature, foundations, the public, etc.) for (1) a large-scale study to determine how direct cash payments can work, their long-term impact, and how they can be funded and (2) at least two to three pilot projects in the State that could provide these payments to every town resident (in a small, rural town), to specific neighborhoods, and/or to means-tested individuals.

Written testimony:

6. Carol Wishcamper, resident of Freeport

- Families need cash now more than ever as COVID-19 increases health and economic disparities.
- Magnolia Mother’s Trust is a new initiative providing low-income African-American mother \$1,000 cash on a monthly basis, no strings attached for 12 months. The pilot program consisted of 20 women and operated from December 2018 through November 2019.
- Based on many significant positive outcomes, the program resumed starting in March 2020 with a new cohort of 80 mothers participating. Thanks to a very generous donor who recognized the severity of the impacts of COVID, an additional 30 mothers were able to enter the program in July 2020 – bring the total number of families to 130.

7. Ginny Schneider, resident of South Portland

- I support an untaxed universal basic income to improve the equalization of wealth.
- Currently, I pay 50 percent of my income in rent and cannot afford to buy a house.
- I have also worked my whole life, yet my social security is half of what I need to retire. I continue to work – taking a job from a younger person who, I am sure, would love the opportunity to work remotely in an essential service as I do.

8. Evelyn Forget, leading researcher of minimum income experiments in Canada

- I would strongly suggest someone from within Maine who is respected by State civil service and who has a very good command of existing programs to conduct a study [that looks at existing research and also at Maine's welfare state to see where there might be opportunities for reforms of existing policies in the direction of more universal or less conditional cash transfers].
- Outsiders can give general comments, but realistically you want something that the State can enact without federal assistance, which means coordinating existing State income taxes, credits and existing social support programs (both State and federal).
- In my experience, existing programs tend to be very complicated so it helps if everyone understands what exists now.