



March 21, 2023

Sen. Anne Carney, Chair
Rep. Matt Moonen, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
Maine State Legislature
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: *LD 564, An Act to Improve Access to Civil Legal Services*

Dear Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Maine State Bar Association, we write in support of LD 564, An Act to Improve Access to Civil Legal Services.

About us. The Maine State Bar Association is a statewide trade association chartered in 1891 by the Maine Legislature. The Association currently represents approximately 3,000 attorneys in the State in both public service and private practice. The Association maintains 28 separate sections covering nearly every field of law practiced in Maine, from Administrative Law to Workers' Compensation Law. Access to justice for all individuals across Maine is a key element of our mission, hence our strong interest in civil legal services.

LD 564. Access to justice is an important issue for our Association and our members. In fact, providing pro bono legal services is one of the obligations of lawyers under the Maine Bar rules, and lawyers and law firms throughout the State contribute generously in this regard – both financially, and through their time. However, the need of Mainers for legal support is great, and more support for civil legal services is needed for those Mainers who cannot otherwise afford help.

During the Legislature's last session, MSBA supported State funding for civil legal services. Since then, the need for civil legal aid has grown as indigent Mainers require assistance with evictions, family law matters, child support and custody matters, foreclosures, and many other civil legal matters. For this reason, we support increased funding for civil legal services and the related organizations who serve indigent Mainers.

In expressing our support for additional funding for civil legal services, however, we are also mindful of the fact that support for civil legal services should in no way reduce or supplant the State's ongoing constitutional obligation to support indigent legal services through the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services. Despite some recent increases in funding, such services are still underfunded by the State, and there is a tremendous need to increase State support to ensure that the necessary legal services are delivered to indigent Maine people. In short, our support for LD 564 is in the spirit of "and," not "or." Maine needs to adequately fund civil legal services *AND* criminal defense services for indigent Maine people.

Conclusion. For these reasons, we support additional funding for civil legal services. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments on LD 564. If you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to let us know.

MSBA Comments re LD 564

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Sincerely,



Stacy O. Stitham
President, Board of Governors

cc: Angela Armstrong, Executive Director
Rachel Okun, Chair, MSBA Legislative Committee
James I. Cohen, Verrill Dana, LLP
Clara McConnell, Maine Street Solutions