



Testimony of New Ventures Maine Executive Director Janet Smith
In Support of LD 564, An Act to Improve Access to Civil Legal Services

March 21, 2023

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Judiciary,

My name is Janet Smith, and I am the Executive Director of New Ventures Maine, which is a program of the University of Maine System within the University of Maine at Augusta. I live in the town of Industry and write today in support of LD564, *An Act to Improve Access to Civil Legal Services*.

The mission of New Ventures Maine is helping Maine people succeed in the changing economy and achieve economic security for themselves and their families. We provide training and individual coaching, both online and in-person in:

- Career planning, access to education and skills training, job search strategies, and job advancement.
- Business plan development, start up support and advising, and linkages to ongoing assistance.
- Money management, matched savings, scholarships, and mini-grant programs that build emergency savings, support investment in home ownership and repair, car ownership and repair, small business development, and postsecondary education.
- Through our leadership of CA\$H Maine, provide free tax preparation and educate tax filers about individuals about programs in their community that can increase their income, reduce debt, and build savings.

Occasionally New Ventures Maine's low-income participants are facing civil legal problems including foreclosure, eviction, property disputes, domestic abuse, financial exploitation, disability discrimination in housing, education, and employment, and more which interferes with their ability to find employment, plan to start a business, and work to improve their household financial security. Having a place to refer these participants to for help them managing the complexities of legal issues and the courts enables them to focus on their goals to improve their economic security.

Maine civil legal aid providers, including our UMS colleagues at the University of Maine School of Law's legal aid clinic, provide legal help to people facing many of life's crises and turning points. With an investment of \$3.9M in the first budget year, and \$7.8M in the second budget year, passage of LD 564 would allow Maine's civil legal aid providers to take significant steps to meet unmet legal needs in Maine.

New Ventures Maine supports LD 564 which will preserve existing legal aid capacity; increase intake capacity and provide free legal help to at least 10,640 more households each year, and address the legal needs of at least 20,000 households through impact litigation and administrative advocacy; and increase

education and outreach efforts to people with legal needs, expand client-facing technology tools, and improve self-help to reach and assist even more people in need of legal help.

Thank you. Please let me know if I can provide additional information about the importance of Maine's civil legal aid provider to our clients in advance of your work session.

Janet Smith
New Ventures Maine
LD 564

Please use this testimony and ignore the testimony that I submitted earlier today.
Thank you.