



May 1, 2023

Senator Joseph Baldacci, Chair  
Representative Michele Meyer, Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
Cross Office Building, Room 209  
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 1666, An Act to Modernize the State Supplement to Supplemental Security Income by Updating the State Supplement and Removing Marriage Disincentives

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Lauren Wille and I am a managing attorney at Disability Rights Maine. DRM is Maine's designated Protection and Advocacy agency, and our mission is to advance justice and equality by enforcing rights and expanding opportunities for people with disabilities in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony supporting LD 1666.

Individuals who receive Social Security Income (SSI) based on disability receive a maximum of \$914 per month. Under current Maine, the state supplements SSI at a rate of \$8 per month. This is less than the cost of a value meal at McDonald's. It equals about \$11,000 in yearly income. It is well below the poverty level.

It gets worse for married couples who both receive SSI. For individuals currently receiving SSI benefits who choose to marry, benefits will be cut so that they collectively will only receive 150% of what they were receiving as individuals. Two unmarried individuals who each receive \$922 per month (SSI plus the state supplement), would have a collective household income of \$1,844 per month. However, if they chose to marry, they same couple would instead receive only \$1,383 per month. This reduction is commonly referred to as the "marriage penalty." It is time to remove this disincentive to marry, and this bill is a good place to start.

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MAINE'S PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY AGENCY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Individuals with disabilities have historically faced many barriers to marriage, both large and small. Many of these barriers are rooted in the ableist notion that disabled people couldn't, or shouldn't, engage in romantic relationships. This notion is incorrect. People with disabilities can and should have the same opportunities to engage in relationships, and that includes marriage for those who wish to pursue it. We should be working to eliminate systemic barriers that prevent people with disabilities from being able to marry, and that includes removing financial disincentives. Single individuals who are already relegated to poverty-level income should not face further cuts should they choose to marry.

LD 1666 will certainly not solve the issue, but it is a step in the right direction. It will modernize the state supplement to SSI by increasing it for individuals, but it also removes the marriage penalty by eliminating the cut that a couple will take should they choose to marry.

For the foregoing reasons, DRM supports LD 1666, and we urge this Committee to vote ought to pass. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "L. Wille". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lauren Wille, Esq.  
Managing Attorney  
Disability Rights Maine