

L.D. 1995: *An Act to Bolster Maine's Workforce and Economy by Increasing Assistance for Parents Pursuing Education and Employment and by Indexing Unemployment Benefits to the Unemployment Rate*

Thank you for accepting this written testimony in support of L.D. 1995. I am Laura Bogardus, and I am the Whole Family Coach for Western Maine Community Action serving Franklin County.

Families who participate in our Whole Family Services program at Western Maine Community Action benefit from the all-inclusive aspect of the support. When a family does not have their basic needs met, their stress level increases to the point of not being able to function well on the most basic level, never mind having the capacity to try to create a better life for themselves and their families through better employment opportunities or education. The Whole Family Approach addresses this by working closely with the family to help fill those basic needs so that the family can begin to think about increasing their income.

A family that comes to mind is one that I am currently working with- a young mother of a one-year-old and is pregnant with her second child who is due in April. She moved out of her mother's home because her mother is a substance user and my client knows that it is extremely unhealthy for her children, as it was for her. She was housed in a motel for a time and was referred to me through the Fedcap agency in my area. She and I immediately began to work on subsidized housing applications, while at the same time working with Fedcap to work on employment goals. She was assigned to Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homeless (PATH) case manager through Kennebec Behavioral Health, who obtained a housing voucher for her and will begin looking for a three-bedroom apartment this week.

Once she has stable affordable housing, she will be better able to focus on her job search again, caring for her children and working on other goals that will improve her situation, such as earning her license and eventually purchasing a vehicle. One of the biggest accomplishments, in my view, is her improved self-confidence about her ability to take care of herself and find resources. When she first enrolled in the Whole Family Service program, she often said that she could not do tasks, such as fill out applications or make phone calls. She will now make phone calls on her own behalf and make a good faith effort in completing the many forms required for services and benefits. I will continue working with her as she moves through the next stages- developing budgeting skills, childcare and reliable transportation. I believe the consistency of having at least one person in her corner across all aspects of her life helps immensely in her ability to move forward, and this is exactly what the Whole Family Approach provides.

Another family that benefitted from our Whole Family Services program is also a young mother of a young child with special needs. She and her daughter shared an apartment with the child's father in a situation that she felt was becoming increasingly unsafe for the two of them. Our first goal when she enrolled in Whole Family Services was to find safe affordable housing for her and her daughter.

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The process was overwhelming with the complexity of subsidized housing applications, work, and taking her daughter to the many medical appointments. She eventually had to leave her job because she could not find reliable childcare. We worked monthly on filling out housing applications and talked weekly to keep her on track with completing more and following through with additional information requests from subsidized rental agencies. She moved into her new apartment in September and re-enrolled in school for business management. She is also enrolled in the Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment (HOPE) program which provides assistance with various aspects of education such as tuition, childcare cost, and transportation for her educational needs. Her daughter is now enrolled in an inclusive early education program where she is thriving, allowing her mother the time to pursue her degree and search for work that will financially support their needs, and be in a high wage and in-demand occupation where she can apply her degree to secure their financial futures.

The Whole Family Services program is extremely valuable precisely because of its holistic nature - the families that we assist will leave the program with increased self-confidence in their own ability to support their family financially and emotionally and to know where to find resources and how to ask the questions to help them garner needed assistance.

Respectfully Submitted,
Laura Bogardus
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