

Testimony of Miriam Jacobs

In support of LD 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

January 16, 2024

Members of legislation, my name is Miriam Jacobs, I live in Canaan, and I am the Child & Family Services Family Engagement Manager at Kennebec Valley Community Action Program (KVCAP). In my role, I oversee the Family Services Content including the Whole Family Coaching and Approach within the Agency.

I support LD 1995 because we all benefit when families have access to high quality Family Support services that include a multi-generational approach as well as a focus on the Whole Family. Supporting a family to create individualized goals that focus on work and/or education allow a family to begin envisioning themselves and their families in a more stable financial situation. When families have the support of a Family Coach, barrier funds for emergency needs, holistic family support, access to resources and referrals, and increased community connections, families can continue to take necessary steps to achieve their goals.

With recent funding from TANF and MeCAP, KVCAP began offering these supports to families within Somerset and Kennebec Counties. Initially planning to start small, the option was highly received and services were provided as well as a growing waiting list. It was quickly realized that providing this type of support to families was meeting a community need. We also learned that in order to support families there had to be an ongoing effort to meet families where they were and to partner with families as they met the many stressors and challenges of everyday life. This included referrals to mental health services, referrals to basic needs such as food and housing, Child Protective involvement, substance use supports and services, as well as many other crisis interventions. Staff need to be skilled and caseloads need to be appropriate to meet the needs of the enrolled families.

Increased funding would allow KVCAP to expand services and serve more families. It will assist in funding increased training, compensation, and lower caseloads for family coaches. KVCAP has seen many families set and reach goals, and to then create new goals that continue to move them forward on their life journey that improves the living situation for them and their families. Allow me to share one family's story.

"As new Mainers, a family partnered with a whole family coach for several years to turn challenges to opportunities and aspirations into successes. At the beginning of their journey together, this small family had a lot of drive, but was struggling month to month to meet basic expenses while trying hard to hold onto their dreams. They worked with their coach to set goals around education, employment, childcare, and managing finances, and were able to lay out a step-by-step plan to reach financial stability.

Their coach helped them to access community support when needed, offered guidance through the inevitable bumps in the road, and helped them turn dreams into reality! Both parents completed college degrees, found full time employment at a living wage, Mom received citizenship, and they have now purchased their first home. This family's journey highlights the life-changing power of collaboration and the real benefits of having ongoing support from programs structured with a deep commitment to whole family efforts."

As a State, we need to increase resources and funding so all children and families have access to quality family support services such as Family Coaching and a Whole family Approach. I am asking you to support this funding because quality programming supports a strong foundation for families that yields positive outcomes for all. Investing in families is key to Maine's success, strong economy and workforce.

Thank You

Miriam Jacobs

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Kennebec valley Community Action Program
LD 1995

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