

Testimony in support of LD 1877
Rebekah Horowitz
February 1, 2024

Good afternoon, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Rebekah Horowitz. I am a single mom from Bangor. I am also graduating with a master's degree in social work in May. I am the Resident Council President of Bangor Housing, and I am a member of the ASPIRE Leadership Team who helped put together the bill you are looking at today. I am before you today to compel you to pass LD 1877.

In 2022, I testified for LD1748, and since then, I have been advocating for families like mine to receive more impactful and accessible services in the TANF program. We have continuously stood before you to ask for improvements to this program that holds so much potential. The way TANF is administered today is more harmful than helpful. Instead of inviting, empowering, and lifting up families, programs like TANF make families feel like their whole lives are questioned when they are simply asking for help. There is little transparency, and often, it is one worker who has the power to determine whether a participant is deserving of help. TANF and ASPIRE participants are automatically eligible for support services that include child care, car repair, help with buying clothing, and more, but instead of this money making it into the pockets of families who need it, it goes unused because of the difficulties families face in accessing the services.

Three years ago, I hit a financial roadblock. I was already enrolled and taking classes as an undergraduate, so when I was approved for TANF, I also entered the ASPIRE program. My 2007 Honda Civic needed brakes and new tires to pass inspection. I needed glasses, I got bifocals. I was never asked if I needed anything for the first two when my Fed Cap representative called me. I told her about my difficulties, and she said she would look into what they could help with. A month goes by, and I am told that I could get 500 for car repair and 100 for my glasses. Both of those amounts were half of what I should have received. I was receiving TANF benefits for five months before I received any additional services, and even after I used the allotment, I had to send proof of purchase receipts to DHHS and Fed Cap.

LD 1877 is asking the department to make it easier for families to access money that is already allocated and budgeted to go to them! The typical shame and blame game, the mistrust of people in poverty, does not empower. Instead, it keeps families afraid to interact with these programs. It keeps them from trusting and believing in themselves, and they are less likely to build the confidence they need to take the next steps, like applying for college or envisioning a career that could sustain them. It is clear that families are struggling. The Governor stated in the State of the State address that "a fundamental of government is to keep people safe." Safety is also found in financial stability. We can do this by supporting LD 1877 by streamlining the process for support services and changing the culture.

Rebekah L. Horowitz