



# VOA NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND

14 Maine Street, Suite 100, Brunswick, ME 04011  
207-373-1140 www.voanne.org

## **Testimony of Richard A. Hooks Wayman in support of LD 1877, An Act to Reduce the Number of Children Living in Deep Poverty by Adjusting Assistance for Low-income Families**

**February 1, 2024**

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Richard A. Hooks Wayman, and I am a resident of Maine and serve as the President & CEO for Volunteers of America Northern New England which is headquartered in Brunswick. I write in support of LD 1877 and its investment in families and children living in poverty.

Volunteers of America (VOA) Northern New England is a faith-based community nonprofit that works with households experiencing deep poverty, disabilities, and homelessness. Our organization provides affordable housing, health services, homeless services, and social support to people across our state. We know the importance of providing direct cash assistance to persons who live at or below the poverty line.

Our program participants talk to us about their struggles. Raising children is expensive. As families struggle with rising housing costs, inflation, increasing energy costs, and childcare expenses, our ability to offer them meaningful, flexible direct financial aid is appropriate. Parents cannot pull themselves out of poverty without social support from their communities and financial assistance to build them employment skills. This bill's efforts to increase the level of monthly cash assistance from TANF, provide constructive transportation assistance, increase the clothing allowance, and allow pass throughs on child support are all reasonable. This bill will reduce poverty and want for children and should be the least that our state accomplishes this year.

Because my organization offers services in Maine and New Hampshire, I also have a birds-eye view across the region, helping me to appreciate how Maine stacks up to other New England states. Maine's TANF benefit level is lower than all our New England neighbors.<sup>1</sup> TANF benefits in neighboring New Hampshire are almost double the value of what Maine families receive.

Importantly, TANF also is a workforce support – providing stability for families while they get their footing and providing education and training supports. As a community-based housing, health, and social service providing agency, we have over 20 open positions (full-time with benefits) that we are unable to fill in the current, tight labor market. This represents nearly 10% of our total workforce that remains unfilled. The state must do everything in its power to advance the pipeline of local talent into the job market.

I am grateful for your leadership and thank you for your public service to Maine!

Richard A. Hooks Wayman  
President & CEO

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/more-states-raising-tanf-benefits-to-boost-families-economic-security>