

Kristin Rogers
Westbrook
LD 1877

Senator Meyer, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Craven, Representative Roberts, Representative Shagoury, Representative Supica and esteemed members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Kristin Rogers. I am a resident of Westbrook and I am a Community School Coordinator in Portland. Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 1877 "An Act To Reduce the Number of Children Living in Deep Poverty".

In the first 4 months of school, an average of 953 children per month in the city of Portland were receiving TANF. Families who receive these benefits are reporting that they are living in "survival mode", a description that is consistent with the fact that TANF grants in Maine are the lowest of any New England state.

In schools we see the effects of families having to rely on these limited TANF benefits and living in survival mode every day. We see it in students who come to school hungry or without proper clothing and outerwear to be prepared for Maine winters. We see it when students are distracted from their academics or anxious because their family is struggling to make ends meet. And we see it when we talk to parents who are trying to figure out how to prioritize their basic needs and which ones they can survive without for a month.

An Act to Reduce the Number of Children Living in Deep Poverty in Maine will modernize Maine's TANF program so that it better aligns with the current economic conditions and the approaches of other states. Increasing grant amounts and access for families will help to reduce the challenges families face so that they can go from surviving to thriving. It would mean fewer families having to juggle priorities to figure out how to provide for their children so that children could focus on their education and just be kids.

Maine's TANF program must catch up to other states so that our families have opportunities to meet their needs, and move out of survival mode into a place where they can focus on longer term goals and opportunities that strengthen our communities. LD 1877, "An Act To Reduce the Number of Children Living in Deep Poverty", is not just an investment in families and the community, but an investment in our children and our future.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kristin Rogers
Westbrook, ME