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United Way  
of Southern Maine



Hello Representative Meyer, Senator Baldacci, and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Taylor Cray, and I am the Advocacy Supervisor at Preble Street. I am submitting testimony today in support of LD 1877: An Act to Reduce the Number of Children Living in Deep Poverty by Adjusting Assistance for Low-Income Families.

At Preble Street, our mission is to provide accessible, barrier-free services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty, and to advocate for solutions to these problems. A large part of this work includes ensuring that individuals and families have the resources they need to succeed and find stability in their lives. For parents living in poverty, nearly every decision they make must be calculated to ensure that their families do not lose access to housing, food, or other necessities. As the cost of living has increased throughout the past few years, low-income Mainers have had to make difficult decisions about how they will continue to house and feed their families.

Across Preble Street programs, caseworkers tell stories of clients struggling to make ends meet and support their families. One caseworker tells of a client who began making slightly too much money to be eligible for TANF and was removed from the program, forcing her to find other ways to support herself and her children. Another caseworker shares the story of a client who struggled to access TANF benefits while unable to work due to being a single parent with a newborn child. This same client also faced the increased hurdle of speaking English as a second language, an issue that many individuals cite as making DHHS services nearly impossible to access easily for those who require translation. Other stories reverberate with the narrative of TANF benefits simply *not being enough*. For low-income families, the cost of housing takes up a significant portion of monthly expenses, far surpassing the recommended 30% of their income.

A [recent article in the New York Times](#), which featured a commissioned study by the Harvard Joint Center for Housing, found that while many safety net assistance programs across the United States have increased in the past decade, housing and rental assistance programs have recently hit an all-time low. Part of the reason for this is the rising cost of housing, which has not only increased the cost necessary to provide housing vouchers, but has also increased the number of Americans in need of them. In Maine, this need is felt all too widely. Housing insecurity and homelessness in Maine have risen significantly in the years during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. Each day at Preble Street, our staff work with individuals who are experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness for the first time in their lives. For many of these folks, the loss of other benefits and assistance has led them deeper into poverty than they have ever previously been. Such is the case for many families that rely on TANF to assist them.



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Increasing TANF benefits will not end child poverty in Maine. What it will do, however, is allow families that are struggling with housing and food insecurity to worry slightly less about how they will pay their bills, clothe their children, and keep themselves afloat while they work toward increased stability. At a time when housing assistance is low and the cost of living is high, any additional assistance that we can give to Maine's families and children is worth the investment. I appreciate your consideration, and ask that you please vote in favor of this bill.

Thank you.

Taylor Cray  
Advocacy Supervisor  
Preble Street



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