



Good afternoon. Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services: my name is Nyawal Lia and I am the Housing Community Organizer for Maine People's Alliance. .

I am here today to testify in strong opposition to the proposed appropriations in the Health and Human Services supplemental budget. Rather than creating a healthier and more equitable Maine, this budget proposal makes cruel and short-sighted cuts that hurt the most vulnerable Mainers: the housing insecure, immigrants, older Mainers, children, parents, and low-income child care workers.

This budget restricts the ability of General Assistance to respond to the affordable housing crisis, exacerbating our housing crisis. In the absence of a state rent relief program—which we advocated for on Friday— Maine’s municipalities are forced to fill the gap by providing critical assistance to people under threat of losing their housing. This proposal limits the amount of available support, restricting municipalities’ ability to provide assistance that fully meets residents’ needs.

It also inexplicably rolls back the “hardship exemption” that allows immigrants and asylum seekers to receive food assistance (SNAP) benefits while they are looking for work in the period immediately after they have received their work authorization. It has been proven that work requirements for SNAP don’t lead to more people working — it leads to more people who are hungry.¹ Permission to work, and the mere availability of jobs does not equate to immediate employment. Immigrants often face multiple barriers to employment beyond the approval of work authorization, including xenophobia, racism, and the need for English language education.

Instead of cutting SNAP, this budget should close the health care gap and ensure health care access for all Mainers. Maine is a stronger, healthier, and more resilient state when everyone has health care, including our family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers who came to Maine from other countries. We need to close the discriminatory gap.

¹ “Expanding Work Requirements Would Make It Harder for People to Meet Basic Needs” Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. 15 March 2023.
<https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/expanding-work-requirements-would-make-it-harder-for-people-to-meet>

This body took great strides to begin to fix child care last year. However, DHHS has delayed a number of these policy initiatives and now they are proposing to delay key reforms by almost a year. That's not right. Instead of making delays and cuts to child care, we should strengthen it by reimbursing child care centers by enrollment rather than attendance. Currently, attendance-based enrollment makes child care providers' revenue streams less predictable, subjecting their financial stability to the unknown forces of sick days, snow days and other absences.

My two children attend a daycare in Portland that has a diverse daycare staff. Staff who have families of their own to support but are at my children's daycare everyday so that people like myself could be able to help make ends meet for my family. Granite I applied for this daycare in Sep,2022 I was not accepted until May,2023.

What life was like for my family and I before daycare was absolutely difficult and for the fact that my children have an amazing daycare with diverse staff to attend everyday sincerely makes me feel secure. What doesn't sit well is knowing that on Thursday's when a local food pantry brings food to the daycare for the families I see almost every staff at the daycare also, take food for their families.

This is a huge indication that the staff could most certainly use more funding when it comes to their wages. Most of the staff are much older along with ones who have huge families to support themselves. One daycare let me know she had 4 children while also attending school as a new immigrant to this country.

This proposal also rolls back the expansion to the Medicare Savings Program passed last year. That expansion provided much-needed assistance to older adults who are struggling to afford their prescription medications. This proposal is the definition of short-sighted: while it saves Maine \$14 million in direct expenditures, it forfeits roughly \$38 million in federal funds and hurts the most vulnerable older Mainers.

I urge you to reject this proposed budget, which is full of harmful and unnecessary cuts that hurt the most vulnerable Mainers. Thank you.