



March 1, 2024

My name is Monique Stairs and I am the Executive Director of Speaking Up For Us (SUFU). SUFU has been the self-advocacy network in Maine since 1993 and we are an established 501(c)3 non-profit. Self-Advocacy is part of the civil rights movement for people living with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) to advocate and voice their opinions on issues that are important to them. Self-advocates are the people who have the lived experience of what it means to live with a disability. Our Board of Directors is made up 100% of adults living with I/DD, which makes us a unique organization.

I am submitting this testimony as a compilation of input from self-advocates across the state to ask you to fund LD 1666 **“An Act to Modernize the State Supplement to Supplemental Security Income by Updating the State Supplement and Removing Marriage Disincentives”**.

Last legislative session self-advocates submitted testimony to the Health and Human Services Committee requesting Maine increase the portion the state provides to social security recipients from \$8 to \$65 and eliminate the marriage penalty for those who choose to get married. Self-Advocates are very passionate about this issue as they live on extremely limited incomes that keep them at or below the poverty level.

While overall Social Security Reform is a federal level issue, Maine legislators have an opportunity to be leaders in supporting people with disabilities to have a better quality of life by making the necessary statute changes that can increase income potential and stop penalizing people live with disabilities who want to get married. Maine will be bringing a cohort of self-advocates to Washington DC in April to attend the Disability Policy Seminar and have visits with Congressional Delegates asking for their support to sign onto federal legislation to increase asset limits and eliminate the marriage penalty. It would be empowering for self-advocates to share that we have the support of Maine’s Legislature in this issue.

Attached below in this document is the original testimonies submitted to the Health and Human Services Committee from self-advocates. Their lived experience and voices are important to hear and I wanted to ensure you have received it. In addition, we are including updated statements from some of the self-advocates who originally testified last session.

I will also share the report findings from the National Council on Disability concerning the need for Social Security Reform. The report can be found here: [National Council on Disability | 2023 Progress Report: Toward Economic Security: The Impact of Income and Asset Limits on People with Disabilities \(ncd.gov\)](https://www.ncd.gov/reports/2023/2023-Progress-Report-Toward-Economic-Security-The-Impact-of-Income-and-Asset-Limits-on-People-with-Disabilities)

If you have any questions please reach out to me at (207) 956-1004 or by email [mstairs@sufumaine.org](mailto:mstairs@sufumaine.org) . Thank you for your time and consideration in supporting people who live with disabilities across Maine.

Sincerely,

Monique Stairs, Executive Director



## Self-Advocate Statements Requesting Funding for LD 1666

**Brian Harnish-** “It is still important, we are still here, it still matters.”

**Jenna Deniger-** “I think it’s important for everyone who is unable to work to get SSI, who is disabled. I think a husband and wife should get equal pay.”

**Daniel Francis-** “When me and my wife got married, we had a financial challenge. It’s important that we both get same amount [of SSI].”

**Jennifer Francis-** “I would like to see the amount [of SSI] increased.”

**Jon McGovern-** “I want to LD 1666 pass so I can get married so I’m not single & where people with Disabilities don’t lose their benefits it hard for them you have to rely on somebody else.”

**Mike Nealey-** “I think it’s very important that they fund LD 1666 because a lot of people are being hurt by the limited funds in place.”

**Joie Easler-** “I really feel that individuals who need help the most are the ones who are struggling the most and if non-disabled people don’t lose their money when they get married, then neither should disabled people. I feel that all people who need the help the most are the ones who are often the most overlooked, and I would really like the people making these decisions about money to put themselves in our shoes and think about how it would feel to have to live on \$1000 per month.”

**Sarah Trites-** “I don’t think it’s fair that people lose their full SSI if they get married. How are you supposed to pay for your food, your clothing, and out-of-pocket medical expenses?”

**Kile Pelletier-** “Last time they said it’s too expensive. Why is it that money cannot be provided to help people with disabilities to have enough to live on? People with disabilities want to work but if they work they lose their benefits so helping pass LD 1666 would help people to be able to get a job and have enough to be more active in the community.”

**Stephanie Pelletier-** “Taking away money because we are married is not fair. Having a livable amount to survive on is worth a budget expenditure.”

**Cynthia Cushing, Community Case Manager, Summit Support Services and NH/ME LEND Trainee:**

“Disability services are severely underfunded, including the Supplemental Security Income fund. Folks who are unable to work a full-time job (because of their disabilities) receive supplemental assistance which, in essence, forces them to remain in poverty. Because of the income ceiling for people receiving SSI, which is \$2000 and which is barely enough savings to be able to pay the first and last month’s rent, as well as the security deposit to have a place to live, people with disabilities remain poor, and stuck.

Less than 25 percent of people with a developmental disability receive adequate assistance for their daily living needs. The monthly amount allotted to someone on SSI is barely enough to live on, even for those who can secure low-income housing payments and other services to assist with the cost of living. Nationwide, there are almost 700,000 developmentally disabled people on waiting lists for these added services, and they wait years to be able to access this much needed funding. Adapting the SSI amount to match what is needed in the year 2024 (and beyond) is one step toward helping folks who, if given the chance, would much rather not have to rely on these services in the first place. It is important that the SSI bill be funded, to give people with disabilities options.”



April 27, 2023  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

**Testimony in support of LD 1666 “An Act to Modernize the State Supplement to Supplemental Security Income by Updating the State Supplement and Removing Marriage Disincentives”**

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Stephanie Pelletier and I live in Fort Kent. I am a self-advocate and currently serve on the Board of Directors of Speaking Up For Us as the Vice Chair. I am a person who lives with a disability and also someone who has lost all of my SSI income because of the marriage penalty.

I want the committee to know that I want this bill to pass because people with disabilities need income to actually live so they can buy clothes and food. The marriage penalty has greatly impacted my life and for awhile I felt like I was useless because I have no money.

When I got married we called social security and they said I would get \$200 but they were just guessing how much income I would still get. After we called them again, they then told me I would only get \$8. Living costs have went up and then I earned \$14. Then I received a paper in the mail that they were taking that away to \$0. That is unfair. They took the income away because I got married. Because my spouse who is a person with a disability expanded his working hours, they took it away.

I also want to share that after my spouse worked more hours, we got another letter in the mail for social security saying he has to pay \$200 back, and I would also have to pay \$200 back. They said that he needed to send his pay stubs, and at one point he had forgot to send it. I still have to pay back even though I didn't receive any money from social security. This is unfair.

My spouse, Kile wants me to be able to be independent and pay for my own things, but right now he has to pay for them out of his money. He has to pay for my clothes and my hygiene products. I would like income to be able to pay for food, clothes and hygiene stuff for myself and not only Kile paying.

I would say that it is unfair that people who get married with a disability have to lose their income. It is unfair to have no income and be dependent on someone else. It makes me feel lower than low as a person. It is very unfair.

Kile and I have done a lot of advocating about this. We even met with a lawyer about this who told us to get divorced and just live together and not be married anymore. This is not an okay solution for me because this would go against my personal values. I am Catholic and if I lived together without being married under God's eyes, it would be considered a sin.

If this bill passes, then I will at least get some money to buy my clothes and hygiene stuff for myself.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Pelletier  
Fort Kent, ME  
[stephanielpelletier@gmail.com](mailto:stephanielpelletier@gmail.com)



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100 State House Station

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Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Brian Harnish and I live in Orono. I am a self-advocate and serve on the Board of Speaking Up For Us.

I come from a place where I was engaged at one point but we couldn't get married because she was able bodied and working full time. While I probably wouldn't have lost my SSDI, I would have lost my MaineCare. I am in support of LD 1666.

The percentage that Maine contributes to SSI not being updated since 1974 is ridiculous and really needs to be changed. Especially with the way the economy is currently.

People not being able to live the way they want is obviously going to affect their mental health. I am also part of the Consumer Council System of Maine and mental health concerns are very important to me. I don't think the marriage penalty is right. It is an antiquated system and it is not giving people the opportunity to live life like they want to.

It is limiting our abilities as persons with disabilities, which are already limited in certain ways. We don't need to be limited more.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony. I will be available to answer questions by email.

Sincerely,

Brian Harnish

Orono, ME

[brian.harnish@gmail.com](mailto:brian.harnish@gmail.com)



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Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Chris Dupont and I live in Columbia Falls, Maine. I am a self-advocate and on the Board of Directors for Speaking Up For Us. I am testifying in support of LD 1666 because I think there should not be a penalty because two people with disabilities are married to each other, we should all be on the same playing field.

This bill is important to me because it helps two of my friends because if we get rid of the marriage penalties, they will get some of their checks back. If people want to get married in the future it will help them decide if they want to lose one of their incomes. It will affect my decision in the future about whether to get married because one of us will lose a large portion of our income.

This bill will help me if I decide to get married in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony. I will be available to answer questions by email or phone.

Sincerely,

Chris Dupont

Columbia Falls, ME

[cdupontfire@gmail.com](mailto:cdupontfire@gmail.com)

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Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Georgia West and I live in Caribou. I am a self-advocate and serve on the board of Speaking Up For Us. I am a person with a disability and I think it is important to pass LD 1666.

When I lived in Indiana I was married and then I was diagnosed with my disability of autism late in life. I have been receiving disability since 2005 and I have not been able to work since then. When I was married, my partner didn't want me to work outside the home, but he struggled to keep a job. I was not in a healthy marriage, but I had no income of my own so it made it really hard to get out. I am no longer married, and I started my life over and live in Maine now.

I also live with many physical challenges and was diagnosed with arthritis at the age of 26. I have stability issues and because of this I have had a lot of major falls and hurt myself. I can't work now because of my physical issues and autism. I am engaged now, and want to get married. I should be with someone I am in love with and I don't want to be told I can't marry them or I will lose benefits. To me that is just wrong.

It is not right, why should people with disabilities suffer? What happens in a person's home is their business. I hear my friends who have lost their income and it is not right. I don't want to lose a right to get married and have to have a choice to either keep my income or lose a person. If I am happy with a person and want to marry them, I should be able to. Nobody should have to choose.

A marriage is sacred, and I shouldn't be given a choice between money or relationship. We need to get rid of the penalty. Telling someone they are going to have to lose their benefits just because they go through with a marriage isn't right.

My friends shouldn't have to get a divorce to have enough money to live.

Raising the income for individuals will be helpful for me because it will help me to get ahead, as long as it isn't just taken up by my rent.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony. I will be available to answer questions by email.

Sincerely,

Georgia West  
Caribou, ME  
[georgiawest26@gmail.com](mailto:georgiawest26@gmail.com)

April 27, 2023



100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

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Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Jenna Deniger and I live in Cherryfield, Maine. I am a self-advocate and am currently involved with Speaking Up For Us. I am testifying in support of LD 1666 because it is important because I know some people that are struggling with the current bill that is in place right now and they get little to no income. I hope this is passed so that my friends and I can get the income that we need.

This bill is also important to me because If I ever want to get married one day, I can still have an income that I can live on. If I didn't have an income, I wouldn't be able to get the things that I need.

The people that I know get little or no income and this bill will provide them with the ability to get the things that they need whether that be things they need medically or things they need every day.

Thank you for your time and consideration and working on this bill as well as the opportunity to submit my testimony. I will be available to answer questions in person, by email or by phone.

Sincerely,

Jenna Deniger  
Cherryfield, ME  
[Jennadeniger8900@gmail.com](mailto:Jennadeniger8900@gmail.com)



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Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Jennifer Francis and I live in Beals, Maine. I am a self-advocate and currently becoming involved with Speaking Up For Us. I am testifying in support of LD 1666 because it is important because this bill takes away the disincentives for a couple for whom both receive social security income.

I am a person who has a social security income because of my Intellectual disability and my husband Daniel Francis also is a person who has a social security income because of his Intellectual disability, and we would benefit from the income being updated to today’s standards. With a little bit of extra income, I could afford the gluten-free diet that I cannot afford today due to my medical diagnosis.

There is no reason why the income should be taken from people who get married. When you get married you still have bills to pay. People should not lose their money when they get married.

This bill is important to me because I know that there are people that would like to have more spending money. I can’t believe they took the money from our income, to begin with.

This bill will help me: It will help us have a little more money at the end of the month to help us with our expenses. This bill will help others: Other people can have more money to pay for their expenses and it will allow them to save a little bit and it won’t take so long to save for the things they need.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony. I will be available to answer questions by email or phone.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Leigh Francis

Beals, ME

[DanielFrancis5890@Gmail.com](mailto:DanielFrancis5890@Gmail.com)





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Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Jon McGovern, I am a self-advocate and I live in Bangor. I am also an employee of Speaking Up For Us, Maine’s Self-Advocacy Network. I am in support of LD 1666 to make SSI modern and remove the marriage penalty.

I have been working on the issue of SSI reform and eliminating the marriage penalty on a state and federal level because it is a big passion of mine. I do want to see the marriage penalty eliminated. It is a big issue for people who have lost their income because of marriage to get it back. I would like to see nobody lose their benefits and for those who have lost benefits to get them back. It is hard to go from having an income all the way straight down to zero.

There are people out there like me, who want to be able to get married. Right now, the marriage penalty is damaging to them because they lose income and benefits. There is not way to deal with the current cost of living increases. They can’t use money to cover other costs they may have for health care, or dental care that isn’t covered by insurance. It is hard for them to get married because they will lose benefits.

It would help people who live with disabilities in Maine if the marriage penalty would go away. I like in the bill that Maine would raise the cost of the state’s SSI contribution from \$8 individual and \$12 couple to \$65 individual and \$130 couple. This would make it easier for people and they would get to keep some income if they are married.

I ask the committee to see this from the point of view of someone who relies on this income. SSI helps people instead of hurts people with disabilities. I think we should eliminate the marriage penalty so people can get married just like everyone else. They need to be able to keep all their benefits so they can have a stable place to live and be in their community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jon McGovern  
Bangor, ME  
[jmcgovern@sufumaine.org](mailto:jmcgovern@sufumaine.org)



April 27, 2023  
100 State House Station  
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**Testimony in support of LD 1666 “An Act to Modernize the State Supplement to Supplemental Security Income by Updating the State Supplement and Removing Marriage Disincentives”**

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Kile Pelletier and I live in Fort Kent, Maine. I am a self-advocate, and I am a Program Associate with Speaking Up For Us. I am testifying in support of LD 1666 because it is important for a person with a disability to be able to get married to another person with a disability and not lose their benefits.

If this bill is passed it will help us a lot by keeping our benefits and increasing the amount of the state income that we get from Social Security. The amount of \$8 is not enough for people with disabilities or other people that are on Social Security. A single person cannot live on \$8 and if you grant up to \$65 it will give a single person a better opportunity to pay their bills and to actually benefit from their Social Security.

Making the change to \$130 per month for a couple will offer some breathing room to live on Social Security. Social Security benefits are our lifeline. We need to keep up with the times as the costs of living go up, food prices go up, gas prices go up, and people with disabilities have a hard time living with the same amount of money. The Social Security rates for the state are not right and it's time to raise it to give us some breathing room.

This bill is important to me because I'm a person with a disability and my wife also has a disability and we depend on Social Security benefits. When my wife and I got married she lost her benefits, and it made her feel useless and poor. It caused me a lot of frustration because I had all of the income responsibility on my shoulders. I know there are things my wife could do like get a job, but she has barriers because of her disability. She doesn't have a car, a license, or the right supports available to her to get working. She isn't currently able to bring in income so we can live like a married couple like everyone else.

The burden of income falls completely on me. I have to pay the bills, go to the grocery store. I have to buy her hygiene products and clothes. She doesn't have income to call her own so she can make money decisions for herself. She always has to ask me. She has to rely on me. The system makes it so that there is a power struggle in our marriage. I believe my wife could be more independent from me, but she can't because she doesn't have any money.

It is a big stressor because I am also working on saving for our future and trying to make sure we can afford a place to live together. I feel at times we fall back instead of moving forward. I see married people without a disability able to go on vacation, go out to eat and the movies, or save and buy a house, and start a family. I have the burden of making sure we have enough food, electricity is paid and gas is in the car. At times, I feel like there is so much and we can't do it. It makes me feel like I should be doing more, but if I do more I will lose more of my benefits. I could lose the only lifeline I have to keep stability. There are times I can't sleep because I am thinking of this issue. I think of all the goals we could reach if only she had been able to keep her benefits and have her own income. I feel like we would be able to finally get ahead.



When we first got married, we thought she would keep some income. When we found out she would only get \$8, and then eventually none, we were shocked. My Mother In Law helped us to advocate. We even contacted a lawyer and he told us we should just get a divorce and live together. It was a slap in the face. Why do people with disabilities have to hide and keep their love secret from the social security administration so they can keep their benefits? If we want to get married we should be able to, just like anyone else. If we have religious beliefs or personal values, we shouldn't have to break them just so one of us doesn't lose their entire income. It just doesn't make any sense why simply getting married automatically changes something. When we get a certain amount of money, we always have to show proof of what it is. When we go over, it is sad and it is taken away. We are told it is a privilege. This doesn't feel like a privilege. Social Security income is our lifeline.

I have been a self-advocate for a long time and the marriage penalty issue is something I am passionate about eliminating. I understand that most of this work needs to be done on a federal level and I have been busy working on that front as well. If Maine chooses to pass this bill, we can be an example to other states to join the forces and eliminate the marriage penalty. It will be an example to Congress to make the change. This will help every person living in the United States to be able to get married if they choose and keep their benefits. They won't have to be afraid to have a family, work as much as they are able to, and make the same amounts of money as everyone else.

There have been several bills on a federal level dealing with Social Security reform that I have urged Congressional Delegates from Maine to co-sponsor. I have taken the opportunity to talk to them when they come to Fort Kent for the sled dog races. I even printed out papers and track down Rep. Jared Golden at the First Mile Brewery. Most recently, I met with an aide from Senator Susan Collins office and the Senator agreed to sign on to the SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act which will raise asset limits for people. I have participated in a national webinar through The Administration for Community Living (ACL) to talk more about the issues people with disability face when they want to get married. I will not stop advocating for this to change because I know what this can do for my life, and for the life of other self-advocates.

Many people with disabilities live in poverty and want out. The system to help support us also holds us back because every time we start to get ahead another thing in our life goes up. Many self-advocates live in shared living or group homes. Whenever there is an income increase, their rent goes up. For once it would be great for us to get the supports we need, keep the benefits necessary, and be able to make plans for our futures.

Thank you for your time and effort. Please keep in mind this bill affects people who live with disabilities and if we don't change the rules of Social Security and eliminate the marriage penalty, people with disabilities will continue to struggle and feel that they can't get married, can't go to work, and can't save for their future because they would lose their benefits.

Thank You for your time, the opportunity to testify, and your consideration of LD 1666. I am happy to answer any of your questions.

Sincerely,  
Kile Pelletier  
Fort Kent, ME  
[kpelletier@sufumaine.org](mailto:kpelletier@sufumaine.org)



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100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

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Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Mike Nealey and I live in Houlton, Maine. I am a self-advocate and am currently on the Board of Directors for Speaking Up For Us. I am testifying in support of LD 1666 because an increase will help, it will help more if my rent does not increase and those with disabilities that want to get married should not lose part or all of their income.

This bill is important to me because I know someone that lost a large portion of their income when they got married and If I decide to get married in the future, I will have to make my decision since I would lose a large portion of my income. If a couple with disabilities wants to get married it will inform them as to what their social security supplement will be.

An increase in Social Security will be a good benefit supplement if my rent does not increase.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony. I will be available to answer questions by phone or email.

Sincerely,

Mike Nealey  
Houlton, ME  
[Nealey858@gmail.com](mailto:Nealey858@gmail.com)



April 27, 2023

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Augusta, ME 04333

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Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Marco Orlando and I live in Brewer. I am a self-advocate and I am the Treasurer on the Board of Speaking Up For Us.

I am someone who lives with a disability so I am on a limited income because of it. I am writing in support of LD 1666. I myself, am not in a position to where I can marry or raise a family. I don't see that happening for me. I would love to see that happen for other people like me. I feel this ties in with my overall beliefs of challenging people's perceptions of what they think people with disabilities are capable of.

I often see people with disabilities settling for less than they deserve because society thinks that is what they can do/deserve. Because of this, a lot of folks miss out on the every day lifestyle that everyone takes for granted of marrying and raising a family.

If that is what a person wants, they should be able to get married without losing income and benefits.

I believe this bill should also further expand on language around the nursing home piece and expand it to people who live in shared living, group homes, etc.

In general, I feel like people should be encouraged to take part in the every day lifestyle that everyone else does. They shouldn't have to risk losing their benefits to do it.

This legislation is a huge step toward leveling the playing field for people like us.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony. I will be available to answer questions by email.

Sincerely,

Marco Orlando  
Brewer, ME  
[mrorando@yahoo.com](mailto:mrorando@yahoo.com)



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Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Nicole Easler and I live in Presque Isle, Maine. I am a self-advocate and a member of Speaking Up For Us. I am testifying in support of LD 1666 because it is important because the cost of living has increased since the pandemic and even though the rate has increased starting in January people are still struggling. People who are married are discriminated against by having part of their check taken away. This is discrimination toward people who are married and is not fair that people who are disabled don't have the same rights if they are married.

This bill is important to me because myself and other people are struggling with the cost of living, and I know people who lost part of their benefits after they have gotten married.

It could potentially give me a bit more money for the things I need and possibly save a bit for future and larger expenses. It will give other people a little extra money to live on and give back the income for those that are married.

It will only hurt me if my rent is increased. If I get another 65.00 each month section 8 is going to take half of that and because of the increase in January of 75.00 my rent will be increased by 30.00 in December therefore my rent will increase by about 60.00 with both increases put together. This will mean that I could potentially have less money for other bills and necessities.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony. I will be available to answer questions by email or phone.

Sincerely,

Nicole Easler

Presque Isle, ME

[easlernicole@gmail.com](mailto:easlernicole@gmail.com)



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Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Regina Bowie and I live in Presque Isle, Maine. I am a self-advocate and currently the Treasure on the Board of Directors for Speaking Up For Us. I am testifying in support of LD 1666 because it is important to update Supplemental Security Income according to the current economic standards.

It adds a little bit of income and gives an update according to the current standard. It will help me deal with the rising cost of daily expenses and a bit of extra income will ease the burden. If I chose to get married in the future, I will know that I or my spouse will not lose our entire income.

I have a fiancé who has really special needs and because of that we are not living together. We tried to have a ceremony because we want to get married. Because of his needs, we were not able to get married the way we wanted to. It has been a negative impact on the both of us. We have tried to do this in a way that works for the both of us. Because of these reasons, we had a commitment ceremony. If we had married like we wanted to, we would have both lost our benefits. This has taken a toll on us both emotionally and physically and we just don't think it is fair. This situation has negatively impacted our lives because we don't even live together like a normal couple.

This bill will help others ease the burden of the expense of living as well as help them make a choice when they plan to get married.

It will hurt if rent is increased all at once and it will feel more like a burden than help. It will be the same for others if their rent is increased all at once, taking the entire income increase.

They need to look at increasing the rent slowly because the added benefits will affect the amount of rent that I will be responsible for paying, therefore we will not really benefit from the increase to help with daily expenses.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony. I will be available to answer questions by email.

Sincerely,

Regina Bowie

Presque Isle, ME

[reginabowie@myfairpoint.net](mailto:reginabowie@myfairpoint.net)



April 27, 2023

100 State House Station

Augusta, ME 04333

**Testimony in support of LD 1666 “An Act to Modernize the State Supplement to Supplemental Security Income by Updating the State Supplement and Removing Marriage Disincentives”**

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Stace Atter and I am a self-advocate. I am active in Speaking Up For Us. I am a person who lives with a disability.

I would like this bill to pass. I currently receive SSDI, and though this bill is only for SSI I still think it is important for people to have an increase. Having access to more income would help me live a better life. It could help me save to go on vacation and visit with my family. They live too far away from me right now and getting there costs money.

In the future I have thought about getting married. But the thought of losing my income would make me very angry. I would be irritated if I lost my income. I currently can't work over 20 hours or I lose my benefits. I need my benefits because I live in shared living and I get community supports to live my life.

I think self-advocates should be able to get married if they choose without having a penalty. I think self-advocates should have the same rights as everyone else.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony. I will be available to answer questions by email.

Sincerely,

Stace Atter

[atter.stacy85@yahoo.com](mailto:atter.stacy85@yahoo.com)





April 27, 2023

100 State House Station

Augusta, ME 04333

**Testimony in support of LD 1666 “An Act to Modernize the State Supplement to Supplemental Security Income by Updating the State Supplement and Removing Marriage Disincentives”**

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Sarah Trites and I live in Sabattus. I am a self-advocate and serve on the Board of Speaking Up For Us.

I am in favor of LD 1666. I think this bill would greatly help people who are on SSI. This could mean that people can marry who they want to and not lose money.

Because the cost of living is so high, the cost of medical equipment is high and if you have less money, you are not able to purchase some of the equipment that you need to help you live as independently as you want to. I do know some stories of people who weren't able to get married in other states because of the marriage penalty.

This doesn't necessarily affect me directly, because I have just straight social security. However, have many friends and fellow self-advocates who have gone through this. This will greatly help them live the lives the way they choose to live.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony. I will be available to answer questions by email.

Sincerely,

Sarah Trites  
Sabattus, ME  
[sarahjt65@yahoo.com](mailto:sarahjt65@yahoo.com)

