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February 11, 2025

Dear Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and esteemed members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Neil Kiely. I live in Falmouth and I am the CEO of Androscoggin Bank.

I am testifying in support of the \$1.3M appropriation for the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund proposed in the State Biennial Budget (LD 210) and asking you to go a step further. In 2023, the Legislature appropriated an additional \$4 million in one-time funding for civil legal aid to meet critical and rising legal needs. Without converting this one-time funding into ongoing support this year, Maine civil legal aid providers will face significant and harmful cuts when the funding expires in June 2025. This means that Maine people will have fewer places to turn for help. Sustaining and increasing this investment in civil legal aid is crucial for maintaining access to justice and well-functioning judicial and economic systems in Maine. We hope you will include this in your budget.

As the CEO of a 154 year-old financial institution that considers itself a long term steward of the economic and social health of our communities, it is incumbent upon me to take a multigenerational perspective of our communities' current challenges. And as a 30 year attorney, I am acutely aware of the long-term consequences if our community members on the lowest rung of our economic ladder do not have access to adequate legal representation.

Maine's future relies on a strong workforce, which requires that people are healthy, housed, and safe. Civil legal issues such as eviction, domestic violence, and exploitation can hinder community and workforce engagement and can create greater societal costs long-term. State investment in civil legal aid helps people navigate these complex problems, promoting healthier, more productive lives and a thriving Maine culture and economy.

Access to civil legal aid addresses the legal needs of people facing eviction, tax disputes, disasters, domestic violence, elder abuse and exploitation, helps people navigating a complex immigration process, and reduces barriers to veterans' benefits, health care, education, or public benefits. Legal aid allows Mainers to meet essential human needs when other resources fall short.

Thank you for your service to our communities and for your thoughtful deliberation on this critical issue.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Neil Kiely'.

Neil Kiely
President & CEO

