



# Maine Developmental Disabilities Council

March 12, 2025

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: please accept this testimony in support of LD 834, An Act to Update the State Supplement to Supplemental Security Income.

The Maine Developmental Disabilities Council (MDDC) works in partnership with people with disabilities, parents, advocates, and policy makers to promote independence, integration, and inclusion of all people with disabilities through advocacy, capacity building, and systems change throughout the state of Maine and on the national level.

Under the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000, MDDC is required to ensure that individuals with developmental disabilities of all ages and their families participate in the design of, and have access to, needed community services, individualized support, and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity, integration, and inclusion in all facets of family and community life. **MDDC is committed to creating a Maine in which all people are valued and respected because we believe communities are stronger when everyone is included.**

Currently, financial disincentives discourage many individuals who wish to marry. In 2023, SSI maximum benefit is \$914 a month (72% of the federal poverty level) . However, if two beneficiaries are married to each other, they are considered an “eligible couple” and don’t get their own separate benefits. Instead, SSI applies a “couple’s rate” of \$1,371 a month — 1.5 times the individual benefit (reducing each person to 54% of the federal poverty level).

The rationale is that by sharing a home and financial resources, a couple can live more economically than two people living alone. However, this rationale is not based in the modern economy. Impoverished single individuals should not face further cuts should they choose to marry.

People with disabilities can and should have the same opportunities to engage in relationships, including marriage for those who wish it. We should be working to eliminate systemic barriers that prevent people with disabilities from being able to marry, and that includes removing financial disincentives.

LD 834 will certainly not solve all of the problems related to the marriage penalty; it is a step in the right direction. MDDC appreciates Maine’s commitment to systemic improvement and appreciate the bipartisan collaboration involved in introducing legislation on this important topic.

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