



March 17, 2025

100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Testimony in support of LD 840 “An Act to Modernize the State Supplement to Supplemental Security Income by Removing Marriage Disincentives”

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

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 in favor of LD 840 “An Act to Modernize the State Supplement to Supplemental Security Income by Removing Marriage Disincentives.”

For the past 2 legislative sessions, 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. This combined bill passed this committee both years but failed to be funded. 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 brought a cohort of self-



advocates to Washington DC in April 2024 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. As we continue to advocate on this issue federally, it would be empowering for self-advocates to share that we have the support of Maine's Legislature in this issue.

I am sharing some additional materials with you regarding this issue, as self-advocates have been advocating for this change for a long time. People with disabilities want to be able to get married just like everyone else and not face a penalty of losing benefits. This marriage penalty is rooted in ableism and the eugenics movement that sought to prevent people with disabilities from marrying and starting families. It is time to make this change and demonstrate that people with disabilities are valued members of our communities.

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/publications/2023/2023-Progress-Report-Toward-Economic-Security-The-Impact-of-Income-and-Asset-Limits-on-People-with-Disabilities)

This toolkit provides additional information regarding SSI and explains the issue on a full federal level. <https://dredf.org/marriage-equality-toolkit/>

This literature review conducted in Spring 2024 by Brygette R. Kunde of Governors State University explains and provides additional resources regarding the link between the eugenics movement and marriage disincentives.

<https://opus.govst.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1149&context=theses>

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

Sincerely,



Monique Stairs, Executive Director

