

**Testimony of Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence
In support of LD 943, An Act to Require the ASPIRE-TANF Program to Be Administered by State
Employees
Before the Committee on Health and Human Services
Thursday, April 3rd, 2025**

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 943, An Act to Require the ASPIRE-TANF Program to Be Administered by State Employees.

The Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (MCEDV) supports LD 943 because we have observed numerous issues with and harm caused by Fedcap’s administration of ASPIRE-TANF. MCEDV’s member programs, including eight Regional Domestic Violence Resource Centers (DVRCS) serve more than 12,000 individual survivors of domestic abuse and violence each year.

Economic abuse affects a significant proportion of those we work with. Nationally, the tactic of economic abuse is recognized in 99% of domestic violence cases¹. The decision and ability to separate from an abusive partner is often heavily influenced by the survivor’s access to tangible financial resources. Data gathered by MCEDV from survivors in Maine has clearly demonstrated that there is a reciprocal relationship between domestic violence and economic instability – abuse creates economic instability. And, in turn, economic instability reduces safety options for survivors and makes them more vulnerable to continued violence and isolation. The ability to access safety often hinges on access to economic resources. MCEDV found that 49% of survivors surveyed accessed TANF benefits as part of establishing safe and stable lives for themselves and their children. Programs such as ASPIRE-TANF are

¹ DV & Economic Justice Financial Abuse. (2025) National Network to End Domestic Violence.
<https://nnedv.org/content/about-financial-abuse/>

often essential to their financial independence from the person causing them harm. These programs need to be both reasonably accessible and trauma informed.

Fedcap has engaged in concerning practices that have created barriers to survivors' access to these critical economic resources, compromising their safety and well-being. These include:

- A demonstrated pattern of not exploring grounds for good cause exemptions for survivors of domestic violence to allow for the reasonable flexibility of engagement in ASPIRE-TANF programs;
- Burdensome requirements that are inflexible, such as meeting schedules for individuals who do not have transportation or not observing individual's other responsibilities for work, school, medical appointments etc.;
- Not accommodating the needs of survivors who have fled abuse and who have critical needs for support that would help a participant with school or work goals, and has been particularly observed for those residing in shelters and/or hotels;
- Conducting unannounced home visits, which can be traumatizing for survivors to have a stranger knocking on their door, or leaving paperwork; and
- Suggesting or even requiring the survivor to have contact with an abusive partner as a means to support compliance with a program expectation or goal.

About half of the people receiving services from the DVRCs have at least one child. Some of those survivors are involved in child protective investigations and interventions because of the abuse and violence that has been perpetrated against them and their children. In 2024, 778 survivors with 2,390 children received support from a Domestic Violence-Child Protective Services (DV-CPS) advocate from DVRCs as they were engaged by child protective services. Advocates help survivors navigate and prioritize the many things necessary for their safety and healing and that they are required to do by CPS in a short amount of time, including: establishing a separate residence; changing childcare providers and/or schools; enrolling children in counseling; providing for all the families' basic needs of food, clothing, etc. The ASPIRE-TANF program is a key resource for many families in these crucial transitional times, and the stakes are very high. Poor communication, long waiting periods, and inadequate support services all delay the much-needed help that this program is intended to provide, and that survivors need when they are seeking safety and stability. Fedcap's inefficiency and poor practice sometimes means that survivors are forced to rely on the person that has been abusive toward them for support, because the alternative may be even more dangerous, particularly for the children.

Despite the above concerns being brought to the attention of Fedcap many times over the last few years, these issues have not been meaningfully addressed. It is time for Maine to move on from this failing approach. Parents and children who have experienced domestic abuse and violence deserve competent, trauma-informed, and effective service from trusted entities.

We are asking you to support LD 943 to require that ASPIRE-TANF be administered by State Employees. Thank you for your consideration of this crucial topic.