

Testimony in Support of LD 943

An Act to Require the ASPIRE-TANF Program to Be Administered by State Employees

Sponsor: Representative Archer

Public Hearing: April 3, 2024 2:00 PM

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Committee On Health and Human Services.

My name is Ruben Torres, and I serve as the Advocacy, Communications, and Policy Manager for the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC). MIRC represents over 100 member organizations statewide, working to improve the economic and social standing of immigrants in Maine and, in turn, strengthen the state as a whole. I am here today representing our coalition in support of LD 943 An Act to Require the ASPIRE-TANF Program to Be Administered by State Employees.

Maine's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and ASPIRE program is meant to be a bridge to economic stability, helping families gain access to meaningful job training, education, and employment opportunities. The goal has always been to help parents secure stable, better-paying jobs so they can support their families and contribute to our workforce. In 2016, Maine moved the administration of the ASPIRE program to a private contractor in an effort to improve services. However, over time, we have seen that this approach has not worked as intended. Families have struggled to access support in a timely and effective way, and some of the core goals of the program—ensuring participants can connect to education, training, and employment that leads to long-term stability—have not been fully realized. This bill presents an opportunity to take a fresh look at how we can best serve Maine families and ensure that TANF-ASPIRE fulfills its promise.

LD 943 would transition the administration of the TANF-ASPIRE program back to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), while still allowing for partnerships with local organizations that provide key services like job training, education, and employment support. This shift will help streamline access to services, improve coordination, and ensure families can connect with the resources they need without unnecessary delays or barriers. Additionally, LD 943 strengthens the TANF-ASPIRE program by ensuring that recipients are prioritized for critical services. Under this bill, all public and private agencies receiving state funds must provide at least one workforce-MaineServe opportunity for ASPIRE-TANF participants. This will help expand job training and employment pathways, ensuring that participants can gain hands-on experience and transition into stable careers.

As this transition moves forward, it will be important to focus on ensuring that services remain accessible, for Maine families who may face additional barriers in navigating public programs. Strong partnerships with community-based organizations will be key to making this transition successful, as they have the skills, cultural, and linguistic expertise to effectively support families across Maine. We believe LD 943 offers a chance to refocus the TANF-ASPIRE program on what truly matters—helping families gain economic security in a way that is efficient, fair, and supportive of their long-term success.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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