



**Testimony of Marge Kilkelly on Behalf of
the Maine Council on Aging to the
Committee on Judiciary**

**In Favor of LD 1022 An Act to Protect and Increase Access to
Justice in Civil Legal Aid Matters for Persons with Low
Incomes**

Submitted April 14, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Marge Kilkelly, and I am a Policy Consultant for the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA) which is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 140 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. The MCOA is a unifying force across sectors that is creating a new narrative about aging and older people in Maine with the goal of building local, statewide, and national support for the systemic changes needed to support our new longevity.

I am testifying in Favor of LD 1022 An Act to Protect and Increase Access to Justice in Civil Legal Aid Matters for Persons with Low Incomes.

Justice is such a fundamental principle in the United States that it is enshrined in the preamble to the Constitution. The role of the government is to assure, to the best of its ability, that every person can expect to have access to justice. That requires everyone regardless of financial status have access to the legal system including legal advice, representation and remedies for individual problems. Navigating the legal system to receive a just outcome is complicated and often requires professional support.

29% of older Maine people live in low income families. Almost 40% of people in Maine 55 and over are considered low income. Civil legal services are essential to older Mainers in dealing with accessing and understanding health care, Social Security, pension and retirement benefits, consumer issues such as creditor issues, financial abuse and exploitation, and guardianship.

The need is even greater in today's world where changes in federal programs that are essential to life and health are happening almost daily and the confusion about eligibility changes is intense and creating great stress. An additional benefit of access to legal services is that as in healthcare, early intervention can often prevent an issue from turning into a catastrophic situation.

The Legislature addressed the need for civil legal services in 2023 with an appropriation of \$4 million in onetime funding but those funds expire in June 2025. While that funding was valuable and appreciated the legal issues facing Maine people are ongoing and we strongly support converting that to ongoing support. If this is allowed to expire, Maine people would have fewer resources and less access to justice.

I urge you to act in support of LD 1022 to assist older Mainers with low incomes to access justice.