



Testimony in Support of LD 1022 – Bridging the Justice Gap in Maine

Provided by: Kara Hay, President and CEO, Penquis

April 17, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Kara Hay, and I am the President and CEO of Penquis, a nonprofit Community Action Agency that serves, on average, 30,000 people each year across Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Knox Counties, as well as neighboring communities throughout Maine. We work every day to help individuals and families access housing, early childhood education, transportation, financial coaching, and behavioral health services, but we cannot do this work alone.

When someone is facing eviction, fleeing domestic violence, or navigating elder abuse, they often need legal help urgently, not someday. Yet, in most civil legal matters, there is no guarantee of counsel unless individuals can find and afford their legal representation. This distinction carries real consequences. It means that many low-income Mainers must face high-stakes legal battles alone, while those with financial resources can navigate the system with professional help. Consequently, thousands of Mainers must confront life-altering legal problems entirely on their own.

At Penquis, we've witnessed the consequences when that help isn't available. Families teetering on the brink of homelessness. Survivors return to unsafe situations. Older adults are losing their savings and stability. The lack of legal representation in civil matters often escalates crises, disproportionately impacting those with the least resources.

Maine's civil legal aid network is highly coordinated and efficient, yet the gap between need and capacity continues to widen. According to national standards, Maine should have 10 legal aid attorneys for every 10,000 low-income residents; currently, we have only three. Without increased investment, the legal needs of many Mainers will remain unmet.

Civil legal aid helps people stay safe, maintain housing, preserve income, protect their health, and care for their families. It supports community well-being, strengthens the workforce, and provides long-term cost savings for our public systems.

LD 1022 represents a forward-looking investment in Maine's future and fosters stability for individuals and communities, ensuring fairness in times of crisis.

Most importantly, this legislation affirms a foundational principle: that access to justice should be available to everyone, regardless of income or residence. This is what equal justice looks like, and this is what LD 1022 helps make possible.

I respectfully request your support for LD 1022. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to building a more just and equitable Maine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kara Hay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kara Hay

President and CEO

Penquis