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Testimony on behalf of Maine Equal Justice in support of LD 1451, *An Act to Strengthen Coordination of Community Transportation in Maine*

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Good afternoon Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and Members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Ann Danforth and I use she/her pronouns. I'm a Senior Policy Advocate at Maine Equal Justice (MEJ), a nonprofit civil legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine.

Maine Equal Justice has been active at the State House for over 25 years. Our work focuses on many of the issues that affect people's daily lives – access to adequate health care, housing, transportation and childcare; food and income security; and higher education and training. MEJ works in partnership with people living in poverty to organize and advocate together for equitable laws and policies. We also provide education and training throughout the state on programs and policies that directly impact individuals and families living with limited means.

I'm here today to testify in support of LD 1451, as access to affordable and reliable transportation is critical to helping people get by and get ahead.

In early 2025, MEJ conducted a survey of over 700 Mainers who were struggling to get by. Transportation was among the top needs respondents identified, along with housing, food, credit card debt, child care, and utilities.

- 42% of respondents said a lack of transportation made it difficult for them to get from where they live to other places like work, the grocery store, or the doctor.
- When asked what people's biggest transportation barriers were:
 - 25% said they need car repairs they couldn't afford;
 - 24% said they don't have enough money to pay for gas;
 - 20% said they have trouble paying for insurance or registration costs;
 - 9% said they need a new car because their current one is beyond repair or too old;
 - 8% said they don't have a car;
 - 7% said they depend on public transportation but it's not useful or available;
 - 1% said their license was suspended due to unpaid fines;
 - The remaining 6% cited other reasons like ADA accessibility, not having a license, or not being able to drive due to a disability.

One survey respondent said: *“Public transportation in this state does not help the low income or disabled to leave their homes and is not affordable, here in Augusta the public bus doesn’t run on weekends, and stops running after 4pm making it impossible to get out of the house for anything... ‘Road safe’ laws for vehicles makes it nearly impossible for low/fixed income families to afford a car and then impossible to maintain a car once you have one to pass inspection...”* - man from Kennebec County

Another shared: *“I depend on public transportation but it’s not useful/available. Can’t seem to save enough to get a license or car. I walk.”* - Milo, Piscataquis County

In addition to seeing the impact of a lack of reliable transportation on clients first-hand, Maine Equal Justice is also the convener of the Invest in Tomorrow initiative, giving us a state-wide workforce perspective. Invest in Tomorrow is an initiative started in 2017 by Maine organizations, businesses and individuals to cut Maine’s child poverty rate in half over the next ten years, while at the same time, strengthening Maine’s workforce. Invest in Tomorrow’s work is rooted in the belief that we all have a stake in addressing child poverty. Poverty challenges our schools, our health care system, our communities, our workforce, and our economy. Invest in Tomorrow envisions a world in which families can meet their basic needs to thrive and find gainful, sustainable employment, lifting their families out of poverty and setting us all on a better path. To that end, we work towards promising policy solutions that will increase the likelihood that every Maine child gets what they need to have a fair shot at a bright future.

Through Invest in Tomorrow’s work, we have learned just how critical access to reliable transportation is to helping Maine families enter and stay in the workforce.

A 2024 survey reaffirmed what MEJ found in our own community survey – 40% of Maine adults experience transportation insecurity, the inability to access needed services or destinations comfortably, conveniently, and affordably.¹ A recent report from the John T. Gorman Foundation highlights the economic and workforce implications of reliable transportation:² “One analysis found that having a car increases an individual’s likelihood of being employed in one year by 10% and their predicted earnings by 31%. Only in the 5% of U.S. neighborhoods with “truly excellent transit service” are individuals in zero-car households able to match these results.” Another recent survey “showed that about 10,500 Mainers are unemployed due to a lack of transportation.”

As the state looks to address transportation challenges, we encourage a two-prong approach focused on 1) public transportation and moving toward more sustainable transportation solutions in the long-term and 2) ensuring people have access to an affordable and reliable vehicle to get by and to meet their needs as we work towards our longer term goals.

LD 1451 will help begin to address some of our state’s transportation challenges. Through the establishment of the Maine Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility Management and a

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https://mcusercontent.com/436413ebbc47347f1009c73ba/files/ac15c644-57c5-50bf-9c12-83b42cb071ab/LD1451_Fact_Sheet_Benefits_of_Greater_Coordination_1_.pdf

² <https://www.jtgfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/JTGF-Transportation-Report-2025-for-web-FINAL.pdf>

state coordinator of mobility management, LD 1451 will create mobility management hubs to improve transportation access and options based on community needs, all of which will further our state's transportation, economic development, and workforce goals.

Thank you for your time and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Ann Danforth