

Testimony on LD 2212

An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

February 27, 2026

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and esteemed members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee; Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee:

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. I am providing testimony in support of including \$3 million in the supplemental FY 2026–27 budget to sustain Maine’s statewide civil legal aid network.

Penquis works 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. Civil legal aid is an essential partner in helping Mainers remain safe and economically stable.

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 own legal representation. This means many low-income Mainers must face serious legal challenges alone while those with financial resources can navigate the system with professional help.

At Penquis, we regularly work with individuals and families who need legal assistance in order to maintain stable housing, resolve benefits issues, or address situations that threaten their safety and financial security. Civil legal aid providers are critical partners in helping our clients resolve problems that our programs alone cannot address.

When legal help is not available, people often struggle to resolve issues that affect their housing, income, health, and safety. Without legal assistance, problems that might otherwise be resolved can escalate, making it harder for individuals and families to achieve stability.

We respectfully request that the Legislature include \$3 million in the FY 2026–27 supplemental budget, in addition to the baseline \$1.3 million appropriation, to sustain Maine’s civil legal aid network through the second year of the biennium.

This funding will maintain the service level already authorized by the Legislature in the first year of the biennium and ensure that civil legal aid providers can continue serving communities across Maine.

Civil legal aid helps Mainers:

- Maintain stable housing and avoid eviction or foreclosure
- Access health care and income supports when benefits are denied or interrupted
- Escape unsafe or exploitative situations
- Protect the rights and stability of children and families
- Navigate complex systems and resolve legal problems that threaten economic stability

Civil legal aid strengthens the network of services that supports Maine families. For organizations like Penquis, access to legal assistance allows us to better support the people we serve and helps ensure that the progress clients make through our programs is not undone by unresolved legal issues.

Thank you for your time.

Kara Hay

President and CEO, Penquis