



Maine Equal Justice  
People Policy Solutions

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

Since 1996, Maine Equal Justice has worked to ensure that people in all sixteen counties have access to the legal help they need to meet basic needs such as staying housed, keeping the heat on, accessing health care, and securing income support. We do this through direct legal representation, policy advocacy to address root causes of poverty, and education and outreach throughout the state.

Maine Equal Justice strongly supports including \$3 million in the FY 2026–27 supplemental budget to sustain Maine’s civil legal aid network through the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund.

Last year’s one-time investment in civil legal aid strengthened our ability, and the capacity of our partners, to respond to growing needs across Maine. Without action this session, that funding will not continue into the second year of the biennium, resulting in reduced access to legal assistance for Maine households facing serious legal challenges. **This funding maintains the service capacity already authorized by the Legislature and prevents a significant reduction in services.**

Every day, our legal team works with people facing urgent barriers to stability. Legal aid is often the difference between keeping and losing housing, maintaining access to health care, or securing essential income support. Beyond helping people through crises, legal aid can be a turning point that allows individuals and families to move toward long-term stability and economic opportunity.

In 2025, Maine Equal Justice handled 919 individual cases across all sixteen counties, helping individuals and families address issues related to housing, health coverage, employment, education, and income support. Housing and income-related cases represented the largest areas of need, reflecting the economic pressures facing Maine households.

Maine Equal Justice also provides legal assistance to individuals who may not be eligible for services through other legal aid providers. In 2025, we represented 42 immigrants facing eviction and achieved a 93 percent success rate in preventing displacement or securing favorable outcomes, ensuring that access to justice extends to all members of our communities.

Alongside individual representation, Maine Equal Justice engages in systemic advocacy to improve the functioning of public benefit programs and remove barriers that prevent eligible Mainers from accessing support. In 2025, this work included administrative and policy advocacy that improved access to food assistance, health coverage, workforce programs, and energy assistance for tens of thousands of Maine residents.

Maine Equal Justice sustains its work through a combination of public and private funding, including the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund, Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA), the Campaign for Justice, foundation grants, and individual donors. The Maine Civil Legal Services Fund provides critical general operating support that is essential to maintaining MEJ's legal services and statewide capacity.

Rising costs of living have significantly increased unmet basic needs across Maine, driving higher demand for civil legal assistance. The ongoing housing crisis and increasing instability in public benefit programs have led to growing numbers of Mainers seeking legal help to maintain housing, secure income supports, and access health coverage.

The one-time funding provided through the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund allowed Maine Equal Justice to sustain expanded staffing capacity in 2025 and respond to this growing demand. Without that funding, we would not have been able to serve hundreds of Maine households who needed legal assistance to maintain basic stability.

**If this funding is not sustained in FY 2026–27, Maine Equal Justice will be forced to reduce staffing and limit the number of cases we can take. This will mean fewer Maine households receiving legal assistance and more individuals and families facing housing loss, benefit terminations, and other legal crises without help.**

These reductions would affect communities across Maine. In 2025, Maine Equal Justice provided legal assistance to households in all sixteen counties, and reduced capacity would mean fewer constituents able to access legal help when they need it most.

Demand for civil legal assistance continues to grow. Sustaining this funding will allow Maine Equal Justice and our partners to continue serving Maine households and addressing legal problems before they escalate into deeper economic crises.

We respectfully urge the Legislature to include \$3 million in the FY 2026–27 supplemental budget to sustain Maine's civil legal aid network and preserve access to justice for Maine households.

Thank you for your consideration.