



**State of Maine Judicial Branch
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**Judicial Branch testimony in favor of LD 564:
An Act to Improve Access to Civil Legal Services**

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Barbara Cardone and I represent the Judicial Branch. I would like to provide additional information in support of LD 564.

As you heard earlier today, Justice Mead, and all the judges and justices of the Judicial Branch, strongly support access to justice. Without access to a lawyer, there is very limited access to justice. Anyone who has seen a proceeding where a non-lawyer is trying to navigate the Rules of Evidence and the Rules of Civil Procedure in a courtroom can see that this is an almost impossible task. Add to that the statutes and case law that governs a particular situation, and it is hard to see how someone who is not schooled in the law can protect his or her rights.

The funding provided by this bill will enable several legal services assistance agencies to support additional initiatives and increase the number of Maine people who have access to an attorney. You will hear from representatives of these agencies, and they will describe actual cases and situations in which the help of an attorney won the client a better outcome in court that *pro se* representation would have done.

The need in the community is even greater amid the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Investing in civil legal aid right now will enable the providers of legal services to expand their current capacity to respond to the growing needs of Maine citizens. Having an attorney representing a party creates efficiencies in how a court can handle a case and allows for the faster resolution of cases.

Others who will testify today will speak more eloquently about specific people and cases that have benefitted from the provision of civil legal aid.

Thank you for your time.