



Mike Tipping
Senator, District 8

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

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Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Mike Tipping. I represent Senate District 8 in Penobscot County and I'm proud to present LD 1666, *An Act to Modernize the State Supplement to Supplemental Security Income by Updating the State Supplement and Removing Marriage Disincentives*.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federal means-tested program that provides cash payments to children with disabilities, adults with disabilities, and people age 65 and up who are US citizens or US. SSI was created by the federal Social Security Amendments of 1972 and began operation in 1974.

In 1974 the federal monthly SSI payment was \$140 for an individual. In 2023 it's \$914 for an individual (more than 6½ times higher) because of almost 50 years of annual cost of living adjustments.

About half of states, including Maine, supplement SSI payments. The minimum state supplemental in Maine law is \$8 a month. Maine currently just barely exceeds that minimum - paying \$10 a month for individuals living on their own. This doesn't increase with the cost of living.

The \$10 hasn't changed in many years. Existing statute says that Maine Committee on Aging and Maine Human Services Council should make recommendations about payments. But those bodies (or their successors) haven't existed since they were repealed more than 30 years ago (in 1991).

LD 1666 is a modest bill that would raise the state SSI supplement to \$65 per month for an individual—bringing it back to where it was in 1974 as a proportion of the federal contribution.

It would also remove the penalty for marriage for people receiving the state supplement.

When both members of a married couple receive SSI, their payments are not the sum of the two individuals' payments. Instead of being double a single person's SSI payment, the SSI payment for the couple is just 1½ times a single person's payment. That's a 25% reduction in what is already a very modest federal SSI payment. It's also just one example of a provision in law that discriminates against people with disabilities who want to get married—as an expression of their love, sometimes to secure the future of themselves any children, and frequently as an expression of their faith.

Maine doesn't have the power to change federal law to remove the marriage penalty for people with disabilities. But Maine *does* have the power to change the state SSI supplement to take a step toward marriage equality for people with disabilities. LD 1666 would achieve

Chair, Labor and Housing Committee

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that by setting the state SSI payment for a married couple (when both receive SSI) at double the level for an individual person (\$130 a month for a married couple).

LD 1666 wouldn't make Maine a leader. It would move Maine from the back of the pack to the middle of the pack—making Maine's state supplement SSI payments about in the middle of the states that provide such payments. And it would index state SSI supplement to increase with cost of living in the same way that federal SSI payments are indexed.

Another portion of the bill would also increase the state supplement and thus the personal needs allowance for some people in institutional care. I understand the Committee is considering other legislation on this subject and would be happy to remove or modify this portion of the bill to bring this legislation into alignment with the legislature's priorities.

Thank you for your consideration and I'm happy to take any questions.