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THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

**Testimony of Senator Nicole Grohoski
In Support of LD 1920, "An Act to Authorize a Supplemental Benefit Relief Payment"**

**Before the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
25 May 2023**

Good afternoon Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. My name is Nicole Grohoski, and I have the honor of serving the 22 coastal towns and island communities that make up Senate District 7. Today, I am pleased to introduce LD 1920, "An Act to Authorize a Supplemental Benefit Relief Payment."

In 2022, this legislative body voted to send relief checks to hundreds of thousands of Mainers, intended to offset the surge in costs due to inflation and supply chain issues. Earlier this year, we sent another round of relief checks. Both were based on 2021 income for returns filed by October 31, 2022. Since then, I have heard from numerous constituents about eligibility issues and complications they've faced regarding relief checks.

The bill before you would create a process for the State to retroactively deliver relief checks for Mainers who slipped through the cracks of the COVID Pandemic Relief Payment Program or the Winter Energy Relief Payment Program. Put simply, this bill provides a supplemental benefit relief payment to eligible residents who did not receive a relief payment because they had not met the residency requirement in 2021 but who were full residents in 2022, or who were not able to file a tax return in time.

I'd like to highlight some constituents of mine who dealt with flaws in how these relief checks were distributed. For example, Woody and his partner, both from Blue Hill, met the basic income requirements to be eligible for these relief checks. However they moved to our great state partway through 2021, and weren't considered full time residents under the requirements. Since moving, they've been active members of the Blue Hill community, and deserve the financial relief as they faced the same rise in costs as their neighbors in the years in which the checks actually arrived, although they weren't eligible for the same relief as their neighbors.

Another couple from Orland in their 80s faced similar struggles when trying to receive their relief checks. They filed their taxes on time with a preparer. While investigating why they had

not received checks, they learned that their filing had not gone through. Therefore, they are ineligible for these checks, by no fault of their own, at a time when the financial assistance would be helpful.

I have another constituent who is a retired IRS agent. Due to a one-time inheritance, he and his wife were ineligible for these checks despite that their income is well below the eligibility thresholds in other tax years, including those in which the checks were received. This constituent explained to me that the federal relief check program included a lookback provision – meaning, if you were ineligible based on your income, the IRS would review if you would be eligible based on your next year's income, and if yes, send a check. This bill is not drafted exactly that way, but that is something I hope I could address through an amendment.

I am sure that many members of this body have received similar calls from constituents wondering if there was any way to receive these relief checks retroactively, as the need is still great. It is my hope, to work with this committee, and legislators on both sides of the aisle, to authorize a legislative fix that delivers relief to those who were eligible and those who fell outside the requirements, unbeknownst to them at the time.

Thank you for your time and consideration.