

## **Testimony in Support of LD 1877 Testimony**

**By Laurie Agaran**

**February 1, 2024**

Greetings Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Laurie Agaran and I am a resident of Bath, Maine. I am a former TANF participant and a single mother. I was previously in a relationship with a partner who had an addiction, was unsupportive, and was verbally and emotionally abusive. My partner looked at me as a female with no goals, even though I stayed home to take care of our children and went to school at the same time.

I used the TANF/ASPIRE program to reach my goal of attaining a degree in Mental Health and Human Services and also used the SNAP program to help me during that time. I utilized the program to help move my family towards a better economic position, I thought I was doing the right thing for me and my kids. But along the way, and since then I have met many challenges.

In these programs I faced prejudice and me and my kids were viewed as a stereotypical low income family living in poverty. There were many times in the past I had to seek help at the GA office for rent, only once have they helped, but I think it was because it was a different person working behind the desk. It seems like people get help in these situations only if the worker determines that they are deserving of it. I faced eviction and unaffordable rent and I needed help. I was in school and trying to lift my family out of poverty, but was looked down on instead of being offered help.

Four years later I finally got into subsidized housing. I was happy, my children and I could move into a home that didn't have on-going black mold issues and an unaffordable rent. Excited that I graduated and eager to work in the mental health field, I pursued a job working as a caseworker. I was hopeful about moving out of subsidized housing and becoming financially stable and doing work that I cared about. Soon my dreams were dashed as I realized things would not get easier. My rent went up, I didn't have food stamps, and I don't receive child support. With one income, after tax and eye/dental for my children are taken out, I receive only \$1350 bi weekly. I utilize the child care subsidy with a small weekly parent fee of \$21 and still have a hard time making ends meet. Families right now are struggling, whether they are working or not, the cost of housing, food, healthcare, and everything else feels impossible.

To reduce poverty and help parents reach their goals, we need to understand the true cost of living in Maine right now! I take home that \$1350 every other week, and have to

pay a car payment and insurance, rent, groceries, clothing/seasonal clothing plus footwear, internet and more just to meet my family's basic needs. I have downgraded many things and cut costs where I can and am still living in poverty after taxes and health insurance. I work hard and it still isn't enough. Families can not reach financial independence without more resources!

Increasing TANF would directly help the lowest income families in Maine, and TANF is the easiest way to get the funds to families in this moment, when there is so much struggle. The TANF grant is so low and you have to make such a small amount to get it, it makes people afraid of going to work because they know just a dollar or two could make them lose their SNAP benefits or TANF, and without these resources parents and kids go WITHOUT! TANF should do more and can do more to help! More families should be eligible in order to lessen the burden on families working hard but still not making enough. It will have a positive impact on kids and parents and in turn on our communities.

I am grateful for the community I live in, the school my children go to was able to help with clothing and footwear for the winter and Christmas gifts. We need to do more as a state to use TANF funds in a way that actually helps—and that means trusting families enough to give them the resources they need! Please pass LD 1877 and get more TANF funds directly to families who desperately need it!