

February 1st, 2024

Good Afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Susan Kiralis-Vernon a proud resident of Vassalboro Maine, a mother of two, a small business owner of Leela's Cultural Treasure, and a Grassroots Human Rights Activist.

Happy Black History Month Here is a short poem by Tupac Shakur.

The Rose That Grew from Concrete

Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete?

Proving nature's law is wrong, it learned to walk without having feet.

Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams, it learned to breathe fresh air.

Long live the rose that grew from concrete when no one else ever cared.

Today I am here in favor of LD 1877. A vital Bill that will lift the most vulnerable families from surviving to thriving.

It is a privilege for me to be here standing before you as a past participant in the TANF Program. I am advocating for a 60% increase in the cash benefit that hasn't had an increase since 1991 - 33 years ago.

This is what a 60% increase means - higher education, employment, sober families, and enriched lives.

My family has problems too grand to share here today but here is a list of what I observe: Alcohol dependence, multiple mental disorders, and sometimes they hit each other.

Coming from a background of trauma has helped to build my resilience in making the bare minimum work which is not ideal. I know that infrastructure can be put in place in 2024 to help poor people sustain themselves and their loved ones.

LD1877 would take a step in reducing low-income families living in generational poverty in Kennebec County and all of Maine. This will boost self-esteem and confidence in parents and children to thrive short term and long term. Your assistance is crucial in making this change happen. It's an intelligent investment with dignifying rewards for my state and our state's holistic well-being.

Thank you for your attention, I am available to address any questions you may have.