



Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs: My name is Adam Zuckerman and I am the Lobbyist for the Maine People's Alliance.

MPA is Maine's largest community action organization with over 32,000 members across the state. Our mission is to create a world where everyone has what they need, contributes what they can, and no one is left behind.

The budget that Governor Mills proposed makes some important advancements. It establishes the Office of New Americans, maintains 55% education funding, and dedicates \$16 million to address homelessness. However, what it gives with one hand it takes away with the other. It makes short-sighted cuts to SNAP, the Medicare Savings Program, child care, and General Assistance. This will hurt the food insecure, older Mainers, Maine families, and those struggling to afford rent, hurting the most vulnerable Mainers.

This would be somewhat more understandable if we were strapped for cash. However, at nearly a billion dollars, the Rainy Day Fund is at its statutory limit. With regularly higher revenue than expected, the general fund is projected to grow by an estimated \$123 million per year on average between fiscal years 2024 and 2027, with the rate of growth accelerating over time.

That's why we were surprised to see that, in addition to making harmful cuts, this proposed budget sets aside an additional \$107 million. While families are struggling to afford housing, child care, and health care and Maine has incredibly strong fiscal standing, this overflow fund seems both unnecessary and unresponsive to the challenges that everyday Mainers are living. This is not a time to be amassing additional funds. This is the time to fund real, lasting solutions to these crises.

What could Maine do with an additional \$107 million?

- \$25 million to create a rental assistance program that would help more Mainers to find homes and keep in their homes
- \$10.8 million to raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour
- \$13.7 million to close the Medicare coverage gap that discriminates against immigrants
- Half a million for education vouchers for essential support workers
- \$6 million for essential services for sexual assault victims with enough left over fund dozens of recovery community centers for Mainers struggling with substance use disorder and to partially close the pay gap for state employees.

This budget is a chance to invest in our state and deliver for the most vulnerable Mainers. I urge you to take it.