

Testimony in Support of LD 2214, "An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025 "

James Myall, Economic Policy Analyst

February 26, 2024

Good morning Senators Rotundo and Baldacci, Representatives Sachs and Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and on Health and Human Services. My name is James Myall; I'm an Economic Policy Analyst at the Maine Center for Economic Policy, and I'm here to testify in neither for nor against of LD Testimony neither for nor against LD 2214, "An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025." In particular, I am here to oppose two initiatives in the Governor's proposed supplemental budget which will hurt access to affordable housing and food, and to propose an addition which would expand access to health care.

MECEP opposes Part II of the Governor's proposal, which would limit the levels of emergency general assistance which a municipality is able to offer to individuals facing homelessness. At a time when Maine is facing extremely high levels of housing insecurity and homelessness caused by a shortage of housing and rapidly rising housing costs, this proposal is short-sighted and harmful. The language in part II would tie general assistance levels to the federal government's local Fair Market Rent definitions. This approach overlooks that the Fair Market Rent information does not always reflect the reality of the property market on the ground, particularly when the number of units available is low. It's one thing to tell a family they can get assistance up to 110% of the Fair Market Rent for a 1-bedroom apartment – but that doesn't help if there are no 1-bedroom units available for rent at or below the middle of the price range. Current law allows municipalities to adapt to these local realities, and should remain in place.

MECEP also opposes Part QQ of the Governor's proposal, which would remove food assistance from asylum-seekers with newly-granted work permits who have yet to find work. We've been here before. The last administration repeatedly tried to cut food

Board of Directors

Barbara Burt, Chair	Sandra Butler	Stacy Mitchell
Lucy Van Hook, Vice-Chair	Maulian Dana	Matt Schlobohm
Pamela Cox, Treasurer	Marcus Hutchins	Lee Webb
Ben Chin, Secretary	Jessica Maurer	

assistance to immigrants and to people who could not find work. This body rejected efforts to punish immigrant families, and we saw the results of the imposition of work requirements on others – there was no benefit to employment, and only an increase in hardship.¹ To be contemplating similar cuts at a time when we’re trying to support New Mainers’ entry into our workforce, and when our Budget Stabilization Fund is full to overflowing is astounding. Asylum seekers should not face a benefit cliff once they receive their work authorization that makes it harder for them to put food on the table every day.

Finally, I would urge you to consider ensuring that all low-income Mainers have access to health care. No one should go without health care simply because of their immigration status, and you have recognized that by extending MaineCare coverage for all children in the state since 2022. Now I would urge you to finish the job, and enable several thousand immigrants, including many visa and green card holders, to qualify for MaineCare if they meet the income requirements. Doing so would not only save lives, but make it easier for New Mainers to work and thrive here.

Despite strong economic growth that has supported budget surpluses, many Mainers remain in need of assistance in housing, food and health care to help them get on their feet. We have the resources to provide these and the moral obligation to protect our vulnerable friends and neighbors. Doing so will strengthen our economy for everyone. I urge you to reject the Governor’s cuts and to expand access to MaineCare.

Thank you. I’ll be happy to take any questions.

Notes

¹ Dottie Rosenbaum and Ed Bolen, “SNAP Reports Present Misleading Findings on Impact of Three-Month Time Limit,” *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*. Dec 14, 2016. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/snap-reports-present-misleading-findings-on-impact-of-three-month-time-limit> and James Myall, “Despite Poliquin’s praise, Maine is no model for food insecurity,” *Maine Center for Economic Policy*. Apr 19, 2018. <https://www.mecep.org/blog/despite-poliquins-praise-maine-is-no-model-for-food-insecurity/>