



Maine Equal Justice

People Policy Solutions

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Testimony on behalf of Maine Equal Justice in support of LD 209, *An Act Making Unified Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2025*

January 23, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and also Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Dina Malual, I use she/her pronouns, and I am a Policy Advocate at Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit civil legal aid organization. Through direct legal representation for people with low income and representation through our systemic advocacy, we are working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for all people in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the supplemental budget. My testimony also includes comments on two sections of the proposal that we do not support.

Stability for MaineCare

First, we are very pleased to see the significant investment in the MaineCare program so its over 400,000 members can continue to receive vital health services and providers can continue to be compensated for their care. Maine people overwhelmingly support improved access to affordable health care and the Administration has demonstrated a continued commitment to fulfilling that promise.

Increased enrollment in MaineCare is not a bad thing. Maine has been a national leader in improving health care coverage and reducing our uninsured rate meaning more Maine people can now visit the doctor, go to the dentist, afford their prescription drugs, and receive essential preventative care. This not only leads to better health and economic outcomes for adults and children, but also to less costly health care expenditures down the road. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the MaineCare program is essential for maintaining the hard-fought progress made under the Mills Administration and prior legislatures and for the collective well-being of our communities.

Childcare Affordability Program

We are glad to see Part N in the Governor's proposal, which amends the Maine Child Care Affordability Program (CCAP) to ensure state General Funds can be used to support any eligible family, regardless of income level. We understand that this clarification will ensure that state funds are not limited to just the expanded CCAP eligibility group, and instead, can be blended and put towards any population, including those

in the traditional eligibility category usually funded with federal funds and who are lower income than the recently expanded group.

General Assistance

General Assistance (GA) is a necessary support for very low-income Mainers whose income does not allow them to pay for basic needs like housing, food, prescriptions, electricity, and heat. It is the “safety net of last resort” but that net has holes in it, and the proposal in the budget creates harmful changes to the program.

The proposal to limit GA to a maximum of 3 months in a 12-month period per household is harmful and fails to provide alternatives for low-income families. This will result in more individuals and families in every county across our state becoming unhoused. While it is being described as a cost-saving measure, it only shifts costs to more expensive supports that are needed when people become unhoused.

GA *is* a program of last resort. Recipients must prove that they have exhausted all other resources before receiving GA benefits. Once a recipient receives GA, there are caps (maximums) on specific assistance types that are categorized such as utilities, medical, housing, etc. To remain in good standing, recipients must make good-faith efforts to reduce their need for GA.

Maine Equal Justice strongly opposes Part S in the supplemental budget. Rather than creating limitations and restrictions to GA to alleviate pressure on the program, there needs to be alternative affordable, accessible housing supports. Because the Mainers affected by this proposal are already in housing, the loss of this assistance without alternative supports will result in an increase in evictions. In just 2023, 6,000 Maine households faced eviction, increasing the eviction total by 16 percent from the previous year. We should be doing all we can to reduce those numbers, not increase them.

Funding for FQHC Pharmacy Access

While we applaud the Administration's commitment to fund our existing obligations under the MaineCare Program, there are still some Maine people who are unable to access the care and medications they need, including many rural residents of regions considered pharmacy deserts, and many immigrants with limited health care options. Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) serve many of the state's rural and under-resourced areas but, in recent years, decreasing pharmacy access has posed a barrier to medication access. If funded, the Pharmacy Access program would enable specific FQHCs to develop or expand their in-house pharmacy services removing one of the major obstacles to affordable prescription drugs for rural Mainers with low income. We would like to see the funding restored for this innovative program in the regions deemed most essential.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts with you today. Maine Equal Justice can be available at any of your work sessions and I'm happy to answer any questions you have now.