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Testimony of the Office for Family Independence  
Maine Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In support of LD 85,  
*An Act to Revitalize the Maine Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Advisory Council*

Sponsor: Representative Meyer  
Hearing Date: February 5, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Ian Yaffe, and I serve as the Director of the Office for Family Independence (OFI) in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. I am here today to testify in support of LD 85, *An Act to Revitalize the Maine Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Advisory Council*.

I'd first like to say thank you to Chair Meyer for bringing forth this bill on behalf of the Department. The TANF Advisory Council is authorized by 22 MRSA §3789-D, which outlines the duties and the membership. Throughout the years since its formation, the Advisory Council has varied in its viability and effectiveness. Especially since the pandemic, participation in the Council has been lackluster. It has been kept alive through the efforts of Jean Dempster, a faithful member. We greatly appreciate her work. Ms. Dempster has now retired from her role at New Ventures, Maine, and we are seeking to revitalize the Council. My office has undertaken an effort to do so, conducting a listening session and an open forum to generate interest and attract new members. We have also arranged for administrative support for the Council and solicited nominations for the Council seats. We received a robust slate of nominations from community partners and stakeholders. These are currently under review, and we anticipate the appointment of new members in the coming weeks.

In conjunction with those efforts, this legislation will simplify the Council's structure and increase its effectiveness. Among other provisions, it authorizes compensation, similar to the legislative per diem, for Council members that are not otherwise compensated for their time serving. The Council is designed to bring a diverse array of perspectives and experiences together, and the compensation provision will further that mission, especially to bring more voices with lived experience in the TANF program to the table. The costs associated with this proposal can be absorbed into existing budgets, and so this bill does not require additional appropriations.

We believe that a vibrant Advisory Council, which includes varied perspectives, will only serve to benefit the TANF and ASPIRE programs and those that participate in those programs. We

support this proposed legislation and appreciate your consideration.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have and to make myself available for questions at the work session.