



Testimony of Dylan Maeby, Esq.
Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc.

Public Hearing on the State Biennial Budget, LD 210
February 11, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs; Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Dylan Maeby. I am a staff attorney in the Veteran's Unit at Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc., and I am speaking to you today to urge you to support continued funding for civil legal aid in Maine. Pine Tree is one of the legal services providers who represent low-income Mainers who otherwise would not be able to access important legal protections.

For our clients, there is no guarantee of legal representation if they cannot afford an attorney. Yet important rights are at stake every day- housing, safety, access to education, financial security- and access to justice.

I would like to tell you about a client of mine, Robert, who is a disabled veteran. He uses a wheelchair and has a van with a lift for the wheelchair on the side. He lives here in Augusta, and although he is not here today, he gave me permission to share his story with you.

Robert volunteers every day at Togus, the VA hospital. He likes to help people and feel useful- something his father, who served at Pearl Harbor, instilled in him. Robert greets veteran patients as they come in and tells them which direction to head for their appointment. If they seem nervous, he shows them the way himself.

Robert has requested civil legal representation a few times when he's faced with a situation of his own that doesn't seem right, and he cannot resolve it himself. The first time I represented him he was facing eviction for failure to pay his electric bill. Despite living in the same apartment for many years and having a section 8 voucher, his landlord decided to make the electric bill his responsibility, when it had never been before. By the time Robert found out about this change, he was facing almost \$900 in electric charges, which on his fixed income, he could not afford to pay. He was given 7 days to pay, or his tenancy would end.

Thankfully, Robert called me, and I reviewed his lease and Section 8 Hap Contract. Noticing that these two documents differed on who was responsible for electricity, I called his landlord, who acknowledged this mistake, dropped the eviction and paid the \$900 bill.

Several months later, Robert reached out again after requesting a parking spot that allowed him to safely enter and exit his van. He needs a place where there is no slope so that his wheelchair can move in and out of the van without taking off down a hill with him in it.

Robert made a request on his own, but his landlord simply ignored it. When Robert and I connected, I quickly put together a formal, written Reasonable Accommodation request. This time, the landlord took immediate action, granting our request and installing the appropriate signage to reserve an accessible parking spot.

Thank you, Senator Carney, Senator Rotundo, Representative Kuhn, and Representative Gattine, as well as the members of both Joint Standing Committees. I urge you to support continued funding for civil legal aid to maintain legal representation for low-income Mainers like Robert. I want to be able to ensure that I can help Robert, and other veterans like him, when they reach out and ask for legal assistance.