

### **Testimony in Support of LD 943**

Good Afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: My name is Kelli Austin. I live in Waterville, and I am here in strong support of LD 943. Additionally, I would like to share my story and highlight the urgent need for change in the administration of the ASPIRE-TANF program. I am a single mother who has faced severe challenges due to Fedcap's mismanagement of the ASPIRE-TANF program, challenges no family should go through with "these supports". This bill presents an opportunity to address critical flaws in the program's administration and provide much-needed relief to families across Maine.

Throughout the past several years, I have been on a challenging journey as a person in recovery who faced homelessness and constant battles to support my family and create a better and brighter future. I applied for TANF in October of 2022. I was a full-time student at Washington County Community College in a dual-degree program for Substance Use and Recovery and Human Services. I was supposed to have been enrolled in the PAS program and eligible for their benefits immediately. However, despite my best efforts, including maintaining a 4.0 GPA, making the President's List, and becoming a member of Phi Theta Kappa, I was overlooked and left without the support I was entitled to. This left me in a situation of profound despair, struggling to navigate a system that had overlooked my efforts and needs.

Not only did I not receive acknowledgment for my achievements, but the support I did receive was poorly managed. Requests for financial assistance were often inadequately documented and delayed. Processing would take months—so long that my car insurance was canceled and my registration lapsed. My car broke down, leaving me unable to access essential resources, such as

the library, a quiet place to study, or even a trip to the grocery store. These delays and setbacks not only hindered my educational pursuits but also jeopardized my family's stability, forcing us to make impossible choices between our basic needs, education, and future.

LD 943 is not just a bill; it's a lifeline for families like mine. By bringing the ASPIRE-TANF program back under the administration of Maine's DHHS, we can ensure that no other family has to endure the bureaucratic inefficiencies and hardships I have faced. This bill has the potential to bring relief and hope to many families, ensuring that programs like PAS are accessible to those who qualify, and families do not have to struggle endlessly due to mismanagement or having to discover these programs elsewhere.

However, despite the lack of support from Fedcap, I will graduate in May as a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor from Washington County Community College. I will continue to pursue my degree in Human Services.

I urge you to support LD 943 to ensure that families like mine receive the respect, timely assistance, and opportunities we deserve so others can succeed without this struggle. By voting for this bill, you are making a profound difference in the lives of countless Mainers. Your support for this bill is not just a vote. It's a vote for respect, recognition, and timely assistance for Maine families. I thank you for listening to my story and for your commitment to improving our welfare programs. Once again, I urge you to vote in favor of LD 943 and take a stand for the families of Maine, who deserve respect, timely assistance, and opportunities to thrive. Thank you for your time.

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