

Susan Kiralis Testimony in Support of LD 1022 – An Act to Protect and Increase Access to Justice in Civil Legal Aid Matters for Persons with Low Income

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Susan Kiralis, and I'm a resident of Vassalboro. I'm here today to testify in strong support of LD 1022 — a bill that will protect and expand access to civil legal aid for low-income individuals and families like mine.

I never imagined I would need legal representation just to navigate a federal assistance program, like TANF. I was eligible for aid to complete my justice degree at UMA, but the support I qualified for was delayed, denied, without reasonable explanation. I was also verbally assaulted. This created an experience of emotional distress.

Humiliation caused me to want to disengage with my community.

I don't move to this country to be anyone's victim!

It was my peers and professors that urged me to seek legal aid due to the nature of my injustices. I was already struggling to make ends meet, and there was no way I could afford an attorney on my own.

Thankfully, I was able to access civil legal aid through Maine Equal Justice. With their support, I now have a racial discrimination federal lawsuit in motion to address the injustice I faced. Without this help, I would have had no way to defend my rights — no access to justice.

I was no longer feeling invisible, I was cared for and treated with dignity. I want poor people in Maine to have this access to legal action demanding compensation and justice for harm caused.

This is why LD 1022 is so important. Legal aid is not a luxury — it's a lifeline. It ensures that families like mine aren't left behind simply because we can't afford legal representation. It helps level the playing field in a legal system that too often feels stacked against poor people. I urge you to support LD 1022 and invest in justice for all Mainers.