

*Testimony of Professor Courtney Beer supporting*  
**LD 1022, An Act to Protect and Increase Access to Justice in Civil Legal Aid Matters for  
Persons with Low Incomes**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary*

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Courtney Beer and I live in Freeport. I am a professor at the University of Maine School of Law and co-director of the Clinics at Maine Law. I am testifying in support of LD 1022, An Act to Protect and Increase Access to Justice in Civil Legal Aid Matters for Persons with Low Incomes.

The Clinics at Maine Law are programs of the University of Maine School of Law in which second and third-year law students, specially licensed to practice under court and agency rules as “student attorneys,” provide free legal services to low-income individuals throughout the state from Fort Kent to Kittery. Student attorneys at the Clinics work under the close supervision of Clinic faculty who are experienced practitioners and members of the Maine Bar. As student attorneys, law students have the opportunity to represent real clients—individuals and families who are navigating the legal system, often in moments of great personal crisis. Students represent their clients in a variety of legal matters, including family law, eviction, protection from abuse, access to health care and education, and more.

The Clinics’ mission is to train the next generation of lawyers while promoting access to justice by meeting immediate and acute needs of vulnerable communities. At a time when Maine faces a growing need for lawyers, the Clinics continue to work to address this challenge. In 2024, our law students provided over 17,000 hours of pro bono legal services to Mainers who were unable to afford hiring private attorneys. Our clients often include survivors of domestic violence, veterans living off of disability benefits, youth with disabilities, and individuals who are incarcerated—people who, given their circumstances, are not able to afford the fees of private attorneys to resolve their civil legal issues.

LD 1022 rightly acknowledges the deep and persistent access to justice gap in Maine and proposes a sustainable and targeted funding source to support and expand access to civil legal aid for low-income Mainers. Currently, more than 80% of the civil legal needs among low-income residents go unmet. Without counsel, Mainers risk losing their homes, their children, or their basic economic security because they cannot afford representation to help them navigate our complex legal system and advocate for their rights.

Importantly, this bill doesn’t just help individuals in crisis today—it creates long-term change by investing in a legal aid ecosystem that includes law schools and clinical training. There is a powerful multiplier effect when law students are trained in the value and practice of civil legal aid. Students who work in our clinics graduate with firsthand experience of how the legal system often fails the most vulnerable and how strategic legal advocacy can change lives. Many of these

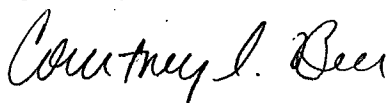
students go on to careers in public interest law, rural practice, or engage in pro bono work in the private sector. Last week, Maine Law's clinical programs were recognized among the best in the nation and we ranked No. 14 among all U.S. law schools for preparing graduates for public interest law.

I am personally a product of that multiplier effect. During law school, I spent one year as a student in attorney in the Clinics at Maine Law from 2006 to 2007. Prior to joining faculty at Maine Law in 2020, I spent the first 13 years of my legal career as an attorney at Pine Tree Legal Assistance representing low-income Mainers. My experience in the Clinics as a law student is the reason that I committed my legal career to public interest work. When you support civil legal aid, you are also cultivating a generation of lawyers who carry forward a deep, practical understanding of equity and the importance of access to justice for all.

I urge this Committee to advance LD 1022. This bill is about more than funding—it's about ensuring that the legal system serves all Mainers, regardless of income. And it's about building a profession committed to justice that is accessible, not aspirational.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to this issue.

Respectfully submitted,



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