

Testimony of Jamison Rhoads-Doyle
to the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

In Support of LD 1022
An Act to Protect and Increase Access to Justice
in Civil Legal Aid Matters for Persons with Low Incomes

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary.

My name is Jamison Rhoads-Doyle, and I am a third-year law student at the University of Maine School of Law. I have been a student attorney in the law school's legal aid clinic, the Clinics at Maine Law for the last year.

I am a resident of Portland, Maine, and I am here to testify in my personal capacity in support of LD 1022, *An Act to Protect and Increase Access to Justice in Civil Legal Aid Matters for Persons with Low Incomes*.

I am testifying in support of LD 1022 for several reasons. First, law students like me benefit tremendously from the opportunity to practice law as student attorneys while still in school. We also learn the skills needed to provide civil legal aid services to clients throughout our careers as attorneys, whether through work for a civil legal aid organization or through pro bono service.

Most importantly, I have seen the positive impact that the Clinic's services have had on our clients and their families. Family law matters are often incredibly important and emotionally challenging for the parties involved, yet far too often, people have to navigate these matters without the assistance of an attorney.

I want to share a story about a client I represented during my time in the Clinic. This case is especially meaningful to me because it is one of the first cases that I worked on in the Clinic. It was a child protection case out of Augusta in which DHHS was investigating my client's ex-partner for abuse and neglect of their two kids. Ultimately, we were able to resolve the case through entry of a Parental Rights and Responsibilities Order which gave our client custody of his kids and enabled him to protect them from harm. It also allowed the kids to have meaningful visitation with their mom and freed up state resources by taking a case off the crowded Protective Custody docket.

Over the duration of the case, I met with my client over ten times and talked with him on the phone dozens of times. Child protection cases are all about figuring out what is best for the kids

involved, so we spent most of this time talking about his kids and how they were doing. It's funny, I've never met them, but over the course of these conversations, I learned their birthdays, their favorite sports, and the names of their pets, classroom teachers, and extended families.

I also learned that our client, their dad, is a hard worker who always puts his kids first. He owns his own business, and he likes to spend his free time playing football in the yard with his kids or taking them fishing, hiking, or swimming. It was very clear from the first time I met him that he knew what was best for his kids. He didn't need a lawyer's help to figure that out. But what he did need help with his navigating the complicated procedures of child protection law and parental rights and responsibilities orders to ultimately reach the legal outcome that would bring about what he knew was best for his kids all along. The Clinic was able to help him navigate that process and reach a just outcome that was in his kids' best interests.

I know that hundreds of attorneys across Maine do similar work every day, providing civil legal aid services for thousands of Mainers. I am very proud to have played a small part in this effort, and I hope that the Legislature will pass LD 1022 so that these attorneys can continue to do this meaningful work for as many Mainers as possible. Thank you.

Dated

4/17/2025


Jamison Rhoads-Doyle