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Street**  
Compassion in Action

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United Way  
of Southern Maine



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

My name is Terence Miller, and I am the Advocacy Director at Preble Street. Preble Street operates 16 programs throughout Maine, and its staff works daily alongside hundreds of individuals and families who struggle with housing insecurity. Our mission is to provide accessible, barrier-free services that empower individuals experiencing challenges related to homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty and to advocate for solutions to these issues. I ask that you support LD 1022: An Act to Protect and Increase Access to Justice in Civil Legal Matters for Persons with Low Incomes.

Preble Street advocates for individuals who have been significantly impacted by poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, and other life-threatening challenges. In much of our work, we see first-hand the impact of insufficient civil legal representation in the lives of our clients. Many individuals arrive at Preble Street in a state of desperation because they have been denied benefits, have been evicted, owe large amounts of money in child support, or have a family law matter.

Their stories are numerous and varied, but all retain the underlying distress from knowing that they cannot defend themselves and their families in court. Thankfully, Preble Street partners with the Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP) to establish the Maine Homeless Legal Project. I want to share one recent client story when a VLP-identified attorney assisted in the eviction process of a local housing authority.

This client, Mary Ann, had experienced homelessness on and off her entire adult life and had recently been housed. She was excited to have a place to call home and was on the path to rebuilding her life when she received a 30-day notice to quit in the mail from her property manager. A fellow tenant had wrongly accused Mary Ann of violating her lease, and the property manager had sided with the other tenant. A Preble Street caseworker helped Mary Ann seek legal counsel through the Maine Homeless Legal Project. Mary Ann was given expert advice that helped her feel safe during an incredibly difficult time, and eventually, her case was dropped. Mary Ann could remain in her apartment, and when her caseworker visited recently, Mary Ann reflected that she was in a much better place, now having "a home, a job, recovery, and peace of mind."

This one story demonstrates the critical need to ensure adequate representation for all individuals and its positive impact on people's lives.

LD 1022 presents an opportunity to fund civil legal aid programs, allowing individuals in similar situations to access the help they need to navigate a complex legal system. In fiscal years 2023-2025, the budget appropriated \$1.3 million annually, even though the legislature allocated \$3.3 million per year in funding. We urge the committee to invest \$6.4 million in Year 1 (2026) and \$9.5 million in Year 2 (2027) by appropriating \$2 million in one-time appropriation into ongoing funding and adding \$3.1 million annually to allow robust access to justice. The National Justice Index requires 10 legal aid attorneys per 10,000 people below 200% of the poverty line. Maine currently has only three attorneys per 10,000 people. The funding provided by this bill will help to increase access to civil legal aid for individuals regardless of their financial status. Everyone deserves the chance to be fairly represented in a court of law.

With this in mind, we ask that you vote to pass LD 1022: An Act to Protect and Increase Access to Justice in Civil Legal Matters for Persons with Low Incomes.

Thank you for your time and consideration.