

**Testimony of Hayley Rice
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**

Date of Public Hearing: April 17, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Hayley Rice, and I am currently a second-year student at the University of Maine School of Law. I am also a student attorney for the Clinics at Maine Law. I am here to testify in my personal capacity in favor of LD 1022, *An Act to Protect and Increase Access to Justice in Civil Legal Aid Matters for Persons with Low Incomes*. I was born in Maine and have lived here for most of my life, I currently live in Monmouth, and I plan to stay and practice law in Maine after graduation. My work in the clinic has shown me first-hand the immense need for legal aid services for individuals in Maine. I have worked on cases involving divorce, child custody, protection from abuse, protection from harassment and child protective custody. I have seen first-hand the gratitude my clients exuded due to the clinics' involvement with their matters. I have a card given to myself and a few fellow student attorneys from witnesses in a hearing we had expressing their extreme gratitude for our efforts and advocacy on behalf of a child with cognitive disabilities who could not do so himself. They stated that "people with disabilities often adapt to the world around them, rather than the other way around." They were grateful that we advocated on his behalf and pushed for a change to this reality, signing their card with "Thanks again for your work, grace, and time."

These matters that I have worked on are not just cases – they are people with goals, hopes, and fears. I get to know my clients during one of the most difficult times of their lives. No one should have to go through the justice system alone – especially, where their barrier to advocacy is

because of their income status. Were it not for the work that is conducted in the Clinics at Maine Law, as well as every other legal aid provider, numerous individuals would be forced to face the system alone, during a time where they require support but are forced to advocate for themselves by negotiating, speaking to the court, and utilizing the rules of evidence and procedure. All skills lawyers spend a minimum of 3 years and a maximum of their entire lives developing. My work in the clinic has solidified to me that my goal after graduation is to advocate for those who truly need it most and may be without it were it not for the funding legal aid provides. Legal aid services not only impact the individual clients, but it also affects families, witnesses, and society at large. Legal aid provides hope for people who may need it most. And lastly, legal aid provides a greater assurance that the system which people enter every day in one way, or another is properly held to its burden of being fair, effective, and just.

Date: April 17, 2025

Signed: Hayley D. Rice.