



Maine Equal Justice
People Policy Solutions

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April 17, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Committee on the Judiciary. My name is Robyn Merrill, and I'm the Executive Director of Maine Equal Justice. We are a nonprofit civil legal aid organization committed to advancing economic security, equity, and opportunity for Maine people living in or near poverty.

Since 1996, we've worked to ensure that people in all 16 counties have access to the legal help they need to meet basic needs—like staying housed, keeping the heat on, accessing health care, and securing income support. We do this through direct legal representation, policy advocacy to address root causes of poverty, and collaboration with legal aid partners across the state.

I'm here today to strongly support LD 1022 because we are at a critical crossroads. Thousands of Mainers face life-altering legal issues—eviction, domestic violence, elder abuse, denial of veterans' benefits—and too many are forced to navigate these crises alone.

Every day, our legal team works with people facing urgent barriers. Legal aid is often the only thing standing between someone and homelessness, or between a parent and the healthcare their child needs. And beyond helping people through crisis, legal aid can be a turning point that allows them to get ahead—like accessing education and training to access gainful employment, or finally accessing long-overdue care.

But those turning points depend on having the resources to meet people where they are—and right now, those resources are at risk.

The \$2 million in one-time funding that allowed us to respond to rising need is set to expire in July 2025. Without legislative action, legal aid services will be cut statewide just when Mainers need them most.

LD 1022 is the solution. It sustains current service levels by converting one-time funds into ongoing support and lays the foundation to close Maine's justice gap through a responsible, phased investment. Right now, Maine has just 3 legal aid attorneys per 10,000 low-income people—far short of the nationally recommended 10.

This is about fairness. Legal aid must be available to people in every corner of the state—from coastal communities to inland towns, from the most rural areas to population centers. But without LD 1022, we will be forced to slash critical support at a time when the need is growing. Instead of moving forward to close the justice gap, we'll fall further behind. This bill is essential to protect and expand access to justice for all Mainers.

We urge your full support for LD 1022. Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to justice for all. I'd be happy to answer any questions.