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Maine Equal Justice
Volunteer Lawyer Project
Maine Civil Legal Services
Commission

**Testimony of Associate Justice Andrew Mead
For the Justice Action Group
Supporting Sustained Funding for Civil Legal Aid
FY 2026–27 Supplemental Budget**

Before the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial
Affairs and on the Judiciary
132nd Legislature
February 2026

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Judiciary, my name is Andrew Mead. I am the Senior Associate Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court, but I am testifying today in my role as Chair of the Justice Action Group—a judge-led coalition created in 1995 that includes Maine’s seven civil legal aid providers and a cross-section of judges, lawyers, and others who support equal access to justice for low-income Mainers.

The Justice Action Group deeply appreciates the Legislature’s longstanding support for the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund, including the \$1.3 million annual baseline appropriation and the Legislature’s decision to provide an additional \$3 million in FY 2025–26. That investment allowed civil legal aid providers to maintain and expand services at a time of rising demand and growing legal need across the state.

Today, we respectfully ask that the Legislature include \$3 million in the FY 2026–27 supplemental budget to sustain that level of support through the second year of the biennium. Without legislative action, funding will drop by \$3 million—resulting in an estimated 28 percent reduction in civil legal aid capacity statewide and at least 5,000 fewer Mainers receiving legal help next year.

Civil legal aid is essential to the fair and efficient functioning of our justice system. Unlike criminal cases, there is no constitutional right to counsel in civil matters—even when those matters determine whether a person keeps their home, maintains access to health care, or escapes abuse. Each year, thousands of Mainers face eviction, loss of income or health benefits, domestic violence, disability discrimination, or other serious legal problems without legal representation.

The seven civil legal aid providers serve low-income Mainers in all 16 counties. They help veterans access earned benefits, assist older adults and people with disabilities in maintaining housing and health care, protect survivors of domestic violence, support children with disabilities, and help families remain economically stable.

The need for civil legal aid is growing. Federal policy changes taking effect over the next two years will result in significant reductions in access to health care, food assistance, and income supports for thousands of Mainers. Legal aid providers will play a critical role in helping eligible individuals understand new requirements, challenge wrongful benefit terminations, and maintain access to essential services.

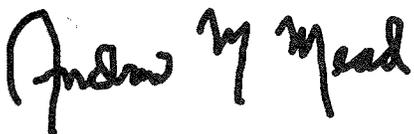
Sustaining the current level of funding will preserve existing legal aid capacity, maintain access to justice for thousands of low-income Mainers, prevent increased strain on Maine courts caused by unrepresented litigants, and protect prior investments already made by the Legislature.

Conversely, failing to sustain funding will reduce services in every county, eliminate legal aid positions, and weaken partnerships with courts, hospitals, shelters, and community organizations.

The request before you is modest relative to the state budget, yet its impact is substantial. Sustaining the \$3 million investment will preserve an essential part of Maine's justice infrastructure and ensure that our courts remain accessible, fair, and efficient for all. It is critical to our aspirational goal of "Justice for All."

For decades, Maine has recognized that equal justice under law requires meaningful access to legal assistance. The Justice Action Group respectfully urges the Legislature to sustain the \$3 million appropriation in FY 2026–27 and continue Maine's commitment to equal access to justice.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be pleased to respond to any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew M. Mead". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Hon. Andrew M. Mead
Senior Associate Justice, Maine Supreme Judicial Court
Chair, Maine Justice Action Group