

**Testimony of Moriah Geer in support of LD 1774,
An Act to Reduce Child Poverty by Leveraging Investments in Families for Tomorrow**
February 14, 2018

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson and members of the Health and Human Services Committee: My name is Moriah Geer and I live in Old Town. I am here today to share my personal experience with the Parents as Scholars program in support of this bill.

8 years ago, I was a homeless mother with two small children. Up until that point I'd been a stay at home mom and an Army wife. I'd been out of the workforce for 4 years and didn't have any marketable work experience. When my marriage ended, I packed up my kids and moved home to Maine, hoping to find a place where I could rebuild my life. We ended up in a homeless shelter and I had to figure out what to do next. I knew that I could not support my family working at the kinds of jobs I've always had—mostly just around minimum wage. I believed that higher education could be my path to creating a better life for my family. I'd heard of the Parents as Scholars (PAS) program and I decided to make use of it and go to school. In the summer of 2011, I moved my family to Orono and started the adventure that led me to where I am today.

I'm not from the Orono area so I knew no one there. I had no safety net, no friends to help me. Parents as Scholars provided that security for me through those first couple of years that I was in school. I took a minimum wage job on campus working around my class schedule, but I could never have afforded the child care and gas money that PAS covered. We got by, but I was walking a very thin line between being able to pay the bills or not. One semester my car broke down. Without a vehicle, I couldn't get to my classes, get my kids to daycare or get to my job, and I most certainly couldn't afford to pay to fix it. That could have been the end of my entire college career but PAS covered the costs of my car repairs and got me back on track.

In 2016 I graduated Summa Cum Laude with a double degree. Parents as Scholars gave me the help I needed to succeed as an undergraduate student, and then that help ended. I was encouraged to go on to graduate school which I have been able to do on my own. I went right into the school of social work's graduate program and I'm currently in my second year. I work on campus and I just started a second job in the community working with children with disabilities. I know that having help from PAS when I did was the reason that I was able to make it this far.

My road has been a difficult one, but I wouldn't trade it for anything. My children are now 9 and 11 and I have been able to show them what hard work and perseverance is and how it can pay off. They've grown up on and around the college campus and higher education is just a normal part of life to them. They don't talk about IF they go to college someday, they say "when I grow up and go to college." I am the first person in my family to earn a college degree, so I didn't have that example growing up. When my kids are ready for college, I'll know exactly how to help them get there and support them through the process.

When I graduate with my Master's degree next year, I will be able to earn far more than I could have ever earned without it. Far more than I've ever lived on in my life in fact. I'll be able to provide stability for my children and for myself that I never had. I'll be able to earn enough that an unexpected expense, like a car breaking down, won't be earth shattering. I have lived most of my life near or under the

poverty line and I can't tell you how excited it makes me to know that I won't have to live like that anymore.

There are so many other families in Maine who could benefit from this program. Families who walk that thin line between making due and having their world fall apart. It's a terrible way to live and this program could be their key to making a better life for their families. I urge you to support this bill and extend this assistance to others who, like me, are capable of so much more with a little help.