



Testimony of Rita Furlow, Senior Policy Analyst  
Maine Children's Alliance  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on  
Health and Human Services  
An Act To Set Aside Funds from Federal Block Grants for Certain Communities  
LD 343  
March 24, 2021

Senator Claxton and Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Rita Furlow. I am the Senior Policy Analyst at the Maine Children's Alliance, and I am here today to provide testimony related to LD 343, An Act To Set Aside Funds from Federal Block Grants for Certain Communities. The Maine Children's Alliance is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit research and advocacy organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies to improve the lives of children, youth, and families in Maine.

At the Maine Children's Alliance, we believe that all Maine children should have the resources and opportunity to reach their full potential from birth to adulthood. Unfortunately, not all Maine children have the same opportunities to succeed. Some groups of children face undeserved barriers to success that result from structural inequalities based on race.

Median household income in Maine by race shows significant disparities, with median household income for Native American people at \$33,767 and for white people at \$58,522. Data from KIDS COUNTS indicates that approximately 34.8% of Native American children in Maine are living in poverty as compared to the state percentage of 13.8% children. This Maine rate is higher than the national poverty rate for Native American children of 32%. In the United States and in Maine, there is significant income inequality based on race and ethnicity. Our history, systems, structures and policies constitute the root causes of this economic inequality. Poverty plays a key role in children's well-being. Children who live in poverty, especially those who live in poverty for long periods of time, are at an increased risk for poor health, cognitive, social, and educational outcomes.

Children who are Native American are more likely to be placed in foster care, with a rate of 13 per 1,000 children compared to the state rate of 8.9 per 1,000 children. Disparities can also be seen in education. Fourth grade reading scores show white children scoring 16 percentage points higher than Native American children while eighth grade math scores indicate a 15 percentage point difference.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Maine Educational Assessment. [https://www.maine.gov/doc/Testing\\_Accountability/MECAS/results/assessmentdashboard](https://www.maine.gov/doc/Testing_Accountability/MECAS/results/assessmentdashboard)

We agree with the goals of this bill to ensure that Maine's tribes receive set asides of federal block grants to support the needs of tribal children and their families. We understand this may require additional funding be found from general fund or other state dollars to avoid cuts in other programming. Members of the tribes should be the decisionmakers about what is in the best interests of their health. We urge the committee and the administration to utilize this legislation as an opportunity to provide stable funding to improve health outcomes for the children and families of Maine's tribal communities.

Thank you for your consideration.