



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association In Support of:
LD 78: An Act To Protect Children from Extreme Poverty by Preserving Children’s Access to
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits**

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Room 220, Cross State Office Building
Thursday, April 1, 2021

Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association. I am here today providing testimony in support of LD 78: “An Act To Protect Children from Extreme Poverty by Preserving Children’s Access to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits.”

MPHA is the state’s oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 500 individual members and 30 organizations across the state. The mission of MPHA is to improve and sustain the health and well-being of all people in Maine through health promotion, disease prevention, and the advancement of health equity. As a statewide nonprofit association, we advocate, act, and advise on critical public health challenges, aiming to improve the policies, systems, and environments that underlie health inequities – but which also have potential to improve health outcomes for all people in Maine. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine’s communities and we take that responsibility seriously.

Currently, under the state’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, if one parent fails to comply with program requirements, Maine’s Department of Health and Human Services terminates assistance to the entire family, including children. This bill amends that provision, such that it terminates benefits for the noncompliant parent, but continues assistance for children and the compliant parent.

MPHA strongly supports this legislation. We believe continuing TANF assistance for children and the complying parent supports their physical and emotional health and economic stability, and that this assistance should not be universally revoked for the entire family because one parent was unable to meet compliance requirements. Failure to comply can be due to a range of issues; and some individuals and families may experience barriers to making their appointments that are not simple to resolve, such as hospitalization, domestic violence, work restrictions, other urgent family matters, and lack of childcare or transportation.

According to the nonpartisan research and policy institute, [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#), “Income supports like TANF during early childhood can improve the lives of children in poverty, clear evidence now shows. With adequate cash benefits, families can pay for essentials like diapers, personal care products, clothes, gas, utilities, and rent. Giving more income to families in poverty relieves the stress that results from a scarcity of resources, which [research](#) has linked to lasting consequences for children’s brain development and physical health. In addition, income support programs can improve children’s academic, health, and economic outcomes,

the National Academies of Sciences’ [report](#) on reducing childhood poverty finds. Even [small infusions of cash](#), like those from TANF, can make a difference.”¹

Ensuring reliable income for low-income families from TANF – even if adjusted for the non-compliant parent – is directly connected to children’s health and development and can alleviate stress for the compliant parent. This bill is good and fair public health policy, which will improve the health of low-income children and families. We respectfully request you vote “Ought to Pass.” Thank you for your consideration.

¹ Floyd I. TANF at 23: Cash income matters to children’s lives. *CBPP Off the Charts: Policy Insight Beyond the Numbers*. August 2019. <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/tanf-at-23-cash-income-matters-to-childrens-lives>.