



Testimony of Stephanie Eglinton
Executive Director, Maine Children's Alliance
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
April 1, 2021

Good morning, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Stephanie Eglinton and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Children's Alliance. We are 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.

I offer testimony on behalf of the Maine Children's Alliance in support of LD 78, which reforms Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) so that children are not cut off from benefits when one parent or caregiver is found to be non-compliant with the program. As child advocates, we strongly support this change that will benefit Maine children living in poverty.

Growing up in poverty can impact a child's life and increases risks for poor outcomes in health, education, and social emotional development. Of the 33,000 children in Maine living in poverty in 2019, over **12,600 children were living in deep poverty** with family incomes below \$12,875 for a family of four – or less than 50 percent of the federal poverty level for a family of four of \$25,750. Due to system and historic inequities, children of color and those in rural areas experience higher rates of poverty.¹

Effective anti-poverty programs increase the chances that children grow up outside the harmful effects of poverty and have a greater chance to meet their full potential. At its core, TANF is intended to ensure that children do not go without basic essentials. TANF fills the gaps during difficult times and provides parents with the tools they need to get and maintain a job, heat their homes, pay their rent and put food on the table for their families. The COVID-19 crisis has been one of the most difficult times for thousands of Maine families. Comparing December 2019 to December 2020, TANF enrollment increased by 525 children from 6,692 to 7,217 children.

Research has shown that strict full family sanctions cause harm to families. They disproportionately cut off families with the greatest challenges and those more likely to be in deep poverty.² LD 78 will improve the TANF program and make it more effective in helping children and families address the challenges of living in poverty.

¹ [Child Wellbeing Indicators & Data | KIDS COUNT Data Center](#)

² [TANF Studies Show Work Requirement Proposals for Other Programs Would Harm Millions, Do Little to Increase Work](#)

Maine's success is incumbent upon the success of its children. If we want Maine children to thrive, we need to reduce the number of children living in poverty. This starts with supporting and strengthening effective anti-poverty programs like TANF. Therefore, I urge you to support of LD 78.

Thank you for your consideration.