

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, ESQ.

LD 78 – Ought to Pass

**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

April 1, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Michael Kebede, and I am Policy Counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, we urge you to support LD 78 because it would make Maine more just and more equitable for children born into poverty.

More than 35,000 children in Maine live in households with incomes lower than \$12,000 per year. These children are disproportionately from Indigenous and Black communities and other communities of color. Compared to their wealthier peers, these children face higher obstacles at every turn to education, healthcare, nutrition, and virtually every other feature of a stable, safe, and dignified life. Fortunately, the state aids some families experiencing poverty through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or TANF benefits. These benefits are not nearly substantial enough to solve the problem of child poverty in Maine, but they make a difference.

This bill would significantly strengthen TANF benefits. Under current law, when an adult in a family does not abide by certain requirements for receiving TANF benefits, the entire family is denied these benefits. Current law does not care

what the child did, only what the parents or guardians did or failed to do. This bill, if enacted, would help ensure that a child's fate does not depend on the deeds or misdeeds of parents or guardians. Enacting this bill would give Maine's children, and the state itself, a brighter future.

We urge you to vote *ought to pass*.