



Megan Hannan, Executive Director  
Maine Community Action Partnership  
c/o Penquis  
262 Harlow Road  
Bangor ME 04402  
207-831-9893

Jason Parent, CEO/Executive Director  
Aroostook County Action Program, Inc.  
PO Box 1116  
Presque Isle, ME 04769-1116  
207-764-3721

Shawn Yardley, CEO  
Community Concepts, Inc.  
240 Bates Street  
Lewiston, ME 04240  
207-739-6553

Rebecca Palmer, Executive Director  
Downeast Community Partners  
248 Bucksport Road  
Ellsworth, ME 04605  
207-610-5904

Suzanne Walsh, CEO  
Kennebec Valley Community Action Program  
97 Water Street  
Waterville, ME 04901  
207-859-1579

Claire Berkowitz, President & CEO  
Midcoast Maine Community Action  
34 Wing Farm Parkway  
Bath, ME 04530  
207-442-7963

Joe Everett, President & CEO  
Opportunity Alliance  
50 Lydia Lane  
South Portland, ME 04106  
207-523-5055

Kara Hay, President & CEO  
Penquis  
PO Box 1162  
Bangor, ME 04402  
207-973-3500

Donna Kelley, President & CEO  
Waldo Community Action Partners  
PO Box 130  
Belfast, ME 04915  
207-338-6809

Jim Trundy, Executive Director  
Western Maine Community Action, Inc.  
PO Box 200  
East Wilton, ME 04234-0200  
207-743-7763

Barbara Crider, Executive Director  
York County Community Action Corporation  
PO Box 72  
Sanford, ME 04073  
207-324-5762

## **Maine Community Action Partnership Supports LD 1693: An Act To Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-being of All Maine People and Create a Health Trust**

**February 9, 2022**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Megan Hannan, Executive Director of the Maine Community Action Partnership, and although we have reservations and are taking a risk, we support LD 1693: An Act To Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-being of All Maine People and Create a Health Trust.

For more than 50 years, Community Action has served as a dynamic and community-based force in addressing the causes and conditions of poverty throughout Maine and the country. Our ten Community Action Agencies (CAAs) deliver programs and services for people with low- and moderate-income, including the Home Energy Assistance Program, or HEAP; workforce development; the current rental relief program; Head Start and more. Above all, our Mission is about equity: in economic opportunity, education and the opportunity to succeed.

I, personally, have a rich history as an advocate for Fund for a Healthy Maine, when we used to call ourselves the "Friends of the Fund for a Healthy Maine." In 1999, when the Master Settlement Agreement was signed, before any funds made their way to Maine, I was active working with many public health partners creating the Fund to assure all of the MSA funds went to public health, disease prevention, a local infrastructure and especially anti-tobacco efforts. I was the Director of Government Relations for the American Cancer Society, so this work was an obvious fit. Since then, as I have changed employers but not my commitment to public health and population health equity, I have continued to advocate for the Fund.

Head Start and Early Head Start were included in the original slate of programs of the fund because Head Start is primary prevention, for the students and their families. Among other ways in which this is true, each student is assessed with Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT), a MaineCare benefit that provides comprehensive and preventive health care services for children. Most of our students are MaineCare members and we specifically use the funds from the Fund to do this at our Early Head Start programs.

Moving these funds to the General Fund is certainly appropriate and we support it in general; we are concerned, of course, that what goes into the General Fund can be removed from the General Fund. Of course, that is also true in the FHM, but there are strong advocates working against those moves.

You may not be aware that the State does not appropriate much to EHS/HS programs; these funds within the Fund, combined with TANF and contracted general funds, comprise a very small fraction of funds to run some of the most cost effective, proven early care and education programs in the country. With more State funds and support, we could offer the programs to more Maine families. For that reason, the Maine Head Start Directors' Association will be working on a campaign to better fund Head Start programs across the state in the near future.

Head Start is an income-tested program, and the good news is that more people are being paid more, between our higher minimum wage and the pandemic driven wage increases, but the concurrent bad news is that families are now just above the income guidelines – meaning they lose Head Start care, education and a free childcare program. Yes, when you lose eligibility for Head Start, you lose your ability to have your children in the safe, nurturing environment they have relied on, and now, with just a little more money in their pockets, families have to pay the full or most of the cost of another childcare provider.

We are working on a fix for this at the Federal level, to be sure. But adequate State funding can do more: keep families who now have and want Head Start in their programs; add more slots for those just over income so they can move into Head Start; and/or to create robust private / public and Pre-K partnerships, benefiting the entire community. And there is the nature of our guarded and hopeful support for the Head Start portion of LD 1693.

There are parts that we support without equivocation, and we urge the committee to support them as well.

The Office of Population Health Equity is already in place, and we hope it is supported financially and politically, so that we can begin to reverse the true health inequity we saw during the pandemic of the past two years. We, as Head Start and Community Action, are already working with the Office and look forward to a long relationship.

We also continue to support the development of a public health workforce; again, we saw what the lack of such infrastructure meant during our time of urgent need. What had been the Healthy Maine Partnerships, locally governed and operated coalitions throughout the state, would have been the go-to organizations to set up COVID vaccine clinics, testing sites, to push out social and traditional media; but they have been unfunded, left to fight for scraps from the State and follow grant money, leaving others to pick up the pieces. I have enjoyed my organization's participation in that effort, this is certainly not complaining about that – we have been talking about needing a robust, reliable public health infrastructure since before the MSA in 1999; I spent countless long days, meetings and years trying to establish it.

Thank you for your time and attention, I am happy to answer any questions I can.

Respectfully,

[Megan D. Hannan](#)  
Executive Director