



Christian Civic League of Maine

Associated with Focus on the Family

Chairmen Brakey and Hymanson, honored members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Carroll Conley of the Christian Civic League of Maine, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of LD 336, An Act To Amend the Requirements of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program.

The vision statement of the Christian Civic League is to see Maine become a state where God is honored, religious freedom flourishes, families thrive, and life is honored. While we may differ on how to accomplish the components of these stated goals, I doubt there is anyone on this committee who does not share these values. The rub often comes in the solutions to the challenges we all recognize and in balancing legitimate competing interests along with prioritizing limited resources.

It's no secret that the League has a long history of advocating for traditional values which more often than not allies us with the conservative elements within the government. I hesitate to even use the terms "conservative" and "liberal", but they are somewhat utilitarian in these settings. The fact is, those of us in both of these camps must admit that we have default positions and a degree of policy "inertia" that can hinder meaningful and productive dialogue.

Rep. Denno reached out to me back in January to challenge me to consider supporting LD 336. I made the usual calls to vet a legislator who reaches out to me I don't know, and the responses were Rep. Denno is an honest, reasonable man with whom I should be able to find some common ground in serving families in Maine. Subsequent personal conversations also revealed that he is a leader who has respects those who may have another perspective on an issue, but he has little tolerance for the petty bipartisanship too often on display here in Augusta on both sides of the aisle.

With that being said, I ask the committee members to take a hard look at the circumstance upon which this bill sheds light. Whether intentional or not, limited resources notwithstanding, optics matter. There must be a way for us to encourage parents (and dare I say especially fathers) to be involved in the lives of their children without jeopardizing the benefits of those parents who truly need assistance. I have to believe there is a way to responsibly and effectively support those families who are genuinely struggling without sending the message that we are going to penalize parental involvement.

I am not here shaming or criticizing, and neither am I here offering a specific solution. This is not a simple matter; therefore, the resolution must be creative which most likely will emanate only from a collaborative process unencumbered by the previously mentioned hindrances to progress. I ask all the HHS committee members to combine the compassion and principled stewardship required to address the issues elucidated by this bill and vote "ought to pass" for LD 336.