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**Testimony of David Sorensen, Senior Policy Advisor  
Office of the Governor**

**In Support of LD 1615, "An Act To Facilitate Substance Abuse Treatment for Certain  
Applicants for and Recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits"**

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
May 19, 2017**

Good afternoon, Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. I am David Sorensen, Senior Policy Advisor to Governor Paul LePage, and I am here to speak in support of LD 1615, a Governor's bill.

Many people coming into the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program suffer from substance use disorder. Unfortunately, the Department of Health and Human Services lacks the tools to be able to identify them and get them the help that they need. This bill would allow the department to screen all applicants to the TANF program for substance use disorder using a non-intrusive, clinically developed written screening test. Currently, the department uses the Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory, or SASSI, test for a very narrow set of applicants who have been convicted of drug-related felonies.

Under this bill, if an applicant's SASSI results do not indicate they have substance use disorder, then the applicant simply moves along in the TANF program. If the result indicates that they do, then they are required to enter treatment in concert with their participation in the TANF program. This bill would not delay or deny their benefits in that case. It also puts a statutory mandate on the department that it helps place the applicant in an appropriate treatment program and also pays for that treatment program.

If the SASSI indicates a positive result and the applicant refuses treatment, then they are given an opportunity to show they do not need it by taking a drug test. Even if the applicant fails that drug test, under this bill, they are still allowed to continue on the TANF program as long as they participate in treatment.

The purpose of this bill is not to deny or delay benefits. The purpose is to ensure that everyone coming into the TANF program who may be suffering from addiction is identified and given the help they need. TANF is, after all, a program designed to help low-income people establish a foothold in the workforce. Leaving substance use disorder unidentified and untreated is fundamentally contrary to that goal and doing so means we are letting down the very people we are trying to help.

Thank you and I would be happy to take any questions from the committee.



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