



Helping People. Changing Lives.

P.O. Box 200 East Wilton, Maine 04234

Rick McCarthy, Senior Advisor
Maine Community Action Association
77 Sewall Street, Suite 3000
Augusta, ME 04330
207-430-8810

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

Jessica Tysen, Executive Director
Midcoast Maine Community Action
34 Wing Farm Parkway, Bath, ME 04530
207-442-7963

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

Suzanne Walsh, CEO/Executive Director
Kennebec Valley Community Action
Program
97 Water Street, Waterville, ME 04901
207-859-1565

Kara Hay, CEO/Executive Director
Penquis
PO Box 1162, Bangor, ME 04402
207-973-3500

Mike Tarpinian, CEO/Executive Director
Opportunity Alliance
510 Cumberland Avenue, Portland, ME
04101
207-553-5819

Keith Small, Executive Director
Waldo Community Action Partners
PO Box 130, Belfast, ME 04915
207-338-6809

Mark Green, Executive Director
Washington Hancock Community Agency
248 Bucksport Rd. Ellsworth, ME 04605
207-610-5904

Steven Johndro, Executive Director
Western Maine Community Action, Inc.
PO Box 200, East Wilton, ME 04234-0200
207-645-4287

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

Testimony of Shawn Yardley

To the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In Opposition to:

LD 10, An Act To Build Greater Accountability into the General Assistance Program by Increasing the Penalty for Falsely Representing Information on an Application for General Assistance

LD 36, An Act To Create a 9-month Time Limit on General Assistance Benefits for Certain Persons

LD 219, An Act To Prioritize Use of Available Resources in General Assistance Programs

LD 220, An Act To Align Time Limits in the Municipal General Assistance Program and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program

April 10, 2017

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Shawn Yardley and I am here today on behalf of Community Concepts, Inc. (CCI) and the Maine Community Action Association (MCAA).

MCAA is comprised of Maine's ten community action programs (CAPs). The CAP's mission is to eliminate and alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty by assisting low-income individuals to move toward self-sufficiency. Each year we serve 200,000 Maine residents providing a variety of services, including Head Start and child care, housing assistance, transportation services, home heating assistance, home repair and weatherization.

Our experience with low-income families makes clear to us the essential role GA plays in assisting families in crisis. The four measures before you today would be punitive to low-income Maine families and are not necessary for program integrity or to protect limited local and state resources.

*Maine Community Action Association, Inc. is incorporated and is tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.
All contributions, grants and bequests to Maine Community Action Association, Inc. are tax deductible.*

www.MaineCommunityAction.org

LD 10 would increase the penalty for falsely representing information on an application for general assistance. It's important to note that a penalty already exists. This act would increase it from 120 days to 24 months. I formerly served as the Health and Human Services Director for the City of Bangor. I can tell you that we did not often have GA applicants give us false information. Maine people are proud and they are generally reluctant to even request help and only rarely scheme to get more assistance. For those who do provide false information, the existing 120 day punishment is sufficient.

The proposed 9 month limit on GA benefits, LD 36, is the return of another bad idea. Most GA recipients are only on the program for a short time and work hard to get off. But there are some who take longer to get on their feet. This is especially significant for housing, which is more than 70% of GA costs. One of the worst things that can happen to a family is to become homeless. The road back to stable housing is a long one and often requires significant public assistance. In the long run, it is much cheaper to keep people housed. Today, families must continue to meet the eligibility requirements to receive GA beyond 9 months. We do not want to force low-income households with no other options out of their homes. Please reject LD 36.

LD 219 is another proposal in search of a problem. Current law already requires GA applicants to exhaust available resources before accessing GA. Municipalities are trained to work with GA applicants to review other available assistance and to pursue it before turning to GA. Adding a penalty serves no purpose here.

I am surprised by LD 220 because the result of passing this proposal is that some low-income working families would be left with few options. It would take GA away for five years from families who have exhausted their 60 month TANF eligibility. In other words, a family unable to get on their feet after five years would not be able to access GA in an emergency for the next five years. Regardless of your view of the parents in this scenario, think what this will mean for the children of those families. In a crisis, they will not benefit from the housing, food or health care that GA could provide. Our public policy should be focused on helping those children become productive adults, not on making the journey to adulthood even harder.

That's not only the humane approach, it's the smart financial approach. Children who succeed generate state revenues as adults, while those who struggle require expensive special education costs as children and are more likely to be in jail or on public assistance as adults.

Please oppose LDs 10, 36, 219, and 220.

Thank you for your time and attention today. I would be happy to take any questions.