



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Testimony in Opposition to LD 1842

Good afternoon, Senator Craven, Representative Farnsworth, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Danna Hayes, the Director of Public Policy for the Maine Women's Lobby. We speak on behalf Maine's 678,000 women and girls, focusing on access to health care, freedom from violence, freedom from discrimination, and the issue that affects all others: economic security.

We oppose LD 1842, *An Act To Amend the Laws Governing the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program*. We have serious concerns both about the removal of the good cause exemption to TANF's work requirements and the elimination of the Parents as Scholars Program.

There are several reasons why a DHHS caseworker may determine an applicant has demonstrated good cause so as to justify exemption from the work requirements of the TANF program. Lack of child care and transportation are very real barriers to seeking employment for many low-income women —barriers that perhaps circularly, could be eliminated with the help of TANF assistance. What is perhaps even more distressing is that this bill does not include an exception for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Since nearly a quarter of TANF participants in UNE and UMO's 2010 study reported that fleeing a violent relationship caused them to seek out public assistance, we have reason to believe that families in extremely dangerous and desperate situations will be unable to access help. It is not uncommon for finances to prohibit a woman's escape from a violent situation, especially a woman with children like those seeking TANF assistance. The elimination of this good cause provision may ultimately make it impossible for many families to seek safety.

We are also extremely disappointed at the proposed elimination of the Parents as Scholars Program, which is truly a pathway out of poverty with a proven track record of success. The program provides low-income parents, mostly women, with the rare opportunity to seek the skills and the education to improve chances of obtaining gainful, higher wage employment. This is a program that sets up low-income families for more economically stable futures and reduces their need for public assistance. This is exactly the type of program in which we should be investing at a time when our poverty rate continues to climb. We urge you not to eliminate this valuable program, and to vote ought not to pass on LD 1842.

Thank you.