



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Good afternoon, Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Danna Hayes, and I am the Director of Public Policy for the Maine Women's Lobby. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan, statewide membership organization devoted to raising the economic, social, and political status of Maine's 678,000 women and girls.

I am here in support of LDs 336, 481, and 1302. We believe these three bills present opportunities for necessary and effective reform that would meaningfully assist program participants to leave poverty for good.

LD 336 would remove the penalty against two-parent families in the TANF program. Removing the so-called "deprivation" of support or care standard means that families who have two parents present but still meet economic thresholds, would receive equal treatment as one-parent households. This change would promote and support the formation of more stable households in which two parents share the burden of work and caretaking. The current standards also disadvantage very low-income divorced parents. Courts have been appropriately trending towards granting joint custody, but many times children still spend the majority of the time with one parent. This bill would mean that divorced parents who technically have joint custody rights, but still exclusively care for their children would not have to demonstrate the absence of the other parent judicially in order to receive assistance.

In regards to LD 481: this bill would solve a nagging disincentive to employment that pulls the rug out from under families who are just beginning to get on their feet. Rather than simply cutting off financial support at a low threshold, this bill would raise the income disregarded for eligibility, phasing it out as parents begin to earn until they are truly self-sufficient. This reduces churn from families prematurely losing benefits and having to reapply when they still need some support and insuring that when they leave TANF behind, it is with stability and a firm footing.

Lastly, we are also supportive of LD 1302, which would provide assistance to TANF and SNAP participants with transportation expenses, including repairs, registration and inspection of vehicles. In a rural state with limited public transportation like ours, it is absolutely critical to one's employment future to have reliable transportation. Unfortunately, owning a vehicle still comes with significant expenses—both expected and unexpected—that are often unaffordable for families needing assistance with even more basic needs like housing and food. Yet, vehicle ownership is useless without ability to keep inspections and registrations up to date and make necessary repairs. This is meaningful assistance that goes directly to a family's ability to obtain

and keep employment. We hope you will support these important measures towards self-sufficiency for low-income Maine families. Thank you.