



# Maine Women's Lobby

## THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

### Testimony in Opposition to LDs 1820 and 1822

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.

I am here to express our opposition to LDs 1820 and 1822, two bills which seek to limit the use of EBT cards to certain locations and types of purchases. There are a number of reasons why these proposals pose logistical challenges to implementation, but our main concerns are that they are rooted in stereotypes and do not address the actual causes of poverty.

We can all agree that fraud in public assistance should be addressed. But we believe the response should be proportional to any alleged abuse. The amount of money and resources these bills propose to expend are, even based on the Department's own research, absolutely disproportionate to any alleged misuse and would merely further inaccurate stereotypes about low-income Mainers. Massachusetts recently worked to impose similar restrictions on EBT use and had little to show for their extensive efforts. We should not be heading down this same road.

The truth is that Mainers are falling further into poverty and we should be spending our time and resources supporting programs with evidenced-based approaches to ending the need for public assistance at all. TANF serves families with very little income, most of which are headed by women. 12,500 Maine children live in homes that receive TANF assistance. The maximum TANF benefit for a family of three is \$485 a month, an amount which has remained static since 2001. It is hard to imagine how families who qualify for TANF could afford even the most basic necessities with this amount, and it should not be surprising to learn that in 2010, 58% of TANF participants reported to researchers from University of New England and University of Maine-Orono that they had to utilize food pantries, 29% got behind on their rent, and 37% reported having their electricity shut off. The vast majority of TANF participants are just scraping by and trying to survive. We should be devoting our time and energy toward ending poverty and reducing the need for assistance by providing opportunity for all Mainers to thrive instead of demonizing those who are struggling.

Thank you.