



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Testimony in Opposition to LD 1815

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 LD 1815, *An Act To Require a Work Search for Job-ready Applicants for Benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program*. While we certainly agree that families in poverty need access to gainful employment, we have concerns about preventing struggling Mainers from applying for benefits at particularly unstable times.

A 2010 study of TANF participants by researchers at UNE and UMO demonstrated that a significant number of participants were in dire financial straits due to disability, lack of transportation or lack of child care. 81% of the participants stated that they would not have a place to live without TANF assistance. Nearly a quarter reported that they applied for TANF because they left an abusive relationship.

Last session, I came before you to support *An Act to Improve Work Readiness for Families Facing Significant Barriers to Employment*. This law, which passed unanimously out of this committee, addresses the barriers to TANF participants' access to gainful employment in a meaningful, long-lasting way. Forcing unprepared, struggling applicants to seek a number of jobs before we can provide the stability of assistance will not address the range of reasons many Mainers struggle to find and maintain employment. In other states that have placed these types of burdensome requirements on applicants, needy families have been turned away unnecessarily. The implementation of last session's efforts means that TANF participants will have access to assessment and resources to seek gainful and lasting employment. We should be encouraging this process which will truly move Mainers from public assistance to gainful employment by not preemptively shutting the door on applicants in such a desperate time. We urge you to vote ought not to pass.

Thank you.