



## **Testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services Regarding**

### **LD 33, An Act to Adjust the Lifetime Limit for the Receipt of TANF Benefits**

### **LD 1017, An Act to Strengthen Work Participation in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program**

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Dan Coyne, and I am Senior Vice President, Community Impact at United Way of Greater Portland. I am here to testify in opposition to LDs 33 and 1017 on behalf of United Way of Eastern Maine, United Way of Greater Portland, United Way of Oxford County, and United Way of York County.

United Ways are a committed partner in moving people up a financial stability continuum, and we support various agencies, programs, and strategies to do so. Ensuring strong income supports that work for people are one such strategy.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is one of those income supports. TANF is only available to families with children, and provides critical assistance for low-income working Maine parents. Families struggling to get out of poverty face multiple significant barriers to employment, including higher than average rates of domestic violence; lack of safe, affordable child care; transportation; disability; lack of education or job skills; and limited educational or training opportunities.<sup>1</sup> Due to such barriers faced by Maine parents in need of temporary assistance, TANF policies should facilitate and reward an individual's pursuit of employment and education, and help them access community resources that can help them build a path to stability.

We oppose LDs 33 and 1017 because we believe they will make it much more difficult for struggling families to get out of poverty. Specifically, these bills collectively will harm children and families by eliminating assistance for people in real need. The families who lose TANF because of a time limit will be at risk for housing problems, such as loss of electricity or heat, inability to seek medical and dental care for themselves or their children, inadequate clothing, or lack of food. We are concerned that these children and families will have few options. Right now our homeless shelters are overflowing and our food banks are stretched to the limit. The changes proposed in these two bills could mean some number of the almost 3,500 children in Cumberland, Oxford, Penobscot, and York Counties whose families currently receive TANF<sup>2</sup> could be homeless or hungry.

We recognize that you and your colleagues have enormous challenges in front of you, but we hope you will find a way to balance accountability, efficiency, and support for the most vulnerable members of our community. We are a committed partner, but we and the programs and services we help fund cannot do it alone. Indeed, we welcome the opportunity to work with the State and other interested organizations to assess the current system and recommend improvements without leaving behind our most vulnerable neighbors.

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<sup>1</sup> "Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness." The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, June 2015.

[http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/USICH\\_OpeningDoors\\_Amendment2015\\_FINAL.pdf](http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_OpeningDoors_Amendment2015_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofi/reports/2017/geo-distribution-mar.pdf>

For these reasons we respectfully encourage you to oppose LDs 33 and 1017.

Thank you for your leadership and service.