



**Testimony of Christine Hastedt, Maine Equal Justice Partners neither for nor against  
LD 256, An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Recipients of Temporary Assistance  
for Needy Families**

**March 7, 2013**

Good afternoon Senator Craven, Representative Farnsworth and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Chris Hastedt, I work for Maine Equal Justice Partners and I am speaking today neither for nor against LD 256 on behalf of the Maine Association of Interdependent Neighborhoods (MAIN). MAIN is a statewide coalition working to improve economic security for people with low income.

LD 256 is a concept draft that proposes to establish work requirements for families receiving assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program and ties those requirements to working with municipal officials to help families seek meaningful work.

As many of you may know, TANF families must already participate in a work program as a condition of continuing to receive that assistance. This condition is prescribed in federal law and also required by Maine law at 22 MRSA §3763. TANF families fulfill this requirement through mandatory participation in the ASPIRE Program, the Department's employment, education and training program.

Families that qualify for the General Assistance Program (GA) administered by local municipalities in Maine are also subject to a work requirement at 22 MRSA 4316-A. That section requires that in order to receive GA a person register for work, search for work, accept any reasonable and appropriate offer of suitable work, or participate in an education or training program to help that person secure employment. Municipalities are also authorized to establish their own work programs in which a GA recipient must perform work for the municipality or a non-profit organization as a condition of receiving assistance.

In any given month between 10-16% of TANF families also receive GA. This is not surprising given that the maximum TANF grant for a family of 3 is only \$485 a month (or \$585 if the family's housing cost exceeds 75% of its income). It is extremely difficult for these families to secure housing for this amount in most parts of the State, let alone meet their other basic needs. Typically these families meet their GA work requirements by

participating in the DHHS ASPIRE Program. This is a reasonable and cost-effective approach as the ASPIRE Program is designed for this purpose and most municipalities do not have the capacity to develop their own work programs.

I do want to call attention, however, to a term that we think is very important in Representative Beaudoin's legislation and that is "meaningful employment." We agree that any employment or other work-related program for TANF families must be designed to provide meaningful work or preparation for meaningful work, meaning that the goal of the work is to raise the family out of poverty so that they will not need to return to public assistance. In too many cases the largely single parent, female-headed families that leave TANF or General Assistance are not able to find jobs that meet this standard. As a result they land up in unstable short-term or part-time jobs that lead to a revolving door back to assistance. From the beginning of the welfare reform efforts as far back as the 1980s, Maine has attempted to address this problem through its ASPIRE Program and its Parent's as Scholars Program by providing the education and training that will help families leave poverty behind.

But more can and must be done to reach this goal, particularly with the high percentage of families today receiving TANF who are coping with significant disabilities of either a parent or a child. We are looking forward to seeing where the Department is headed with the ASPIRE redesign that is currently in progress. Moreover we understand that this Committee will see other legislation this session aimed at improving the assessment process in the TANF program to better assess the needs of families with disabilities that are receiving TANF benefits.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about this legislation with you today. I would be glad to try to answer any questions that you may have.