

Testimony of Susan Wasserott, Director of Legislative Affairs

Maine Department of Labor

In Support of

LD 1815, "An Act To Require a Work Search for Job-ready Applicants for Benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program"

Before The Joint Standing Committee on

Health & Human Services

Sponsored By: Representative Fredette of Hampden

Date of Hearing: March 25, 2014

Senator Craven, Representative Farnsworth, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services, my name is Susan Wasserott and I am the Director of Legislative Affairs for the Maine Department of Labor. I am here to testify in support of LD 1815, "An Act To Require a Work Search for Job-ready Applicants for Benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program."

There is tremendous value in work -- not only in terms of providing income, but also in terms of providing a sense of purpose and self-worth and forging relationships with colleagues and connections to the larger community. When individuals are experiencing the types of financial difficulty that would bring them to TANF, the best long-term solution is employment. Being unemployed is a difficult challenge, and the sooner individuals can get back to work, the better.

LD 1815 proposes a work-search requirement for job-ready applicants of TANF. A similar requirement exists as a condition for individuals to receive unemployment (UI) benefits under both state and federal law in all states. Individuals must be able and available to work and *actively seeking work* each week in which they submit a claim for benefits. Similar to the UI requirement, this proposal requires that job ready individuals applying for the TANF program conduct a work search. It is my understanding that they would be assisted in further job searches as well.

Since the department has a similar requirement, I thought it might be helpful to provide some insights based on our experience. With UI, satisfying the work search requirements means that claimants must produce verifiable documentation of their application for at least three jobs for each week in which they claim benefits. Verifiable documentation of application includes items like the business name, address, telephone number, position title, and name of the contact person, if known. For example, a printout of the email submitted with a resume attached, could serve as evidence.

In the electronics age, we find that many employers use an on-line application system that provides no verifiable documentation. In these cases, we recommend that applicants print the application when transmitting it; especially the confirmation page. Our experience also suggests that employers do not always maintain records of those who applied, particularly those who walk in without an appointment. It helps when applicants keep their own documentation to provide proof when needed.

We would encourage TANF applicants to access the Maine Job Bank as part of their job search. Right now over **6,900 jobs** are available through the job bank. Once registered, an applicant is matched with open jobs and emailed a referral to which they can respond to initiate an application. The Maine Job Bank uses an on-line application system so applicants would want to print their application, including the confirmation page, to document their submission. The link to the Maine Job Bank can be found here:

<https://gateway.maine.gov/dol/mjb/jobseeker/jobseekerwelcome.aspx>

The Department of Labor supports this bill because it dovetails nicely with the department's commitment of serving Maine workers and businesses. We understand that people often need a hand up when tough times come. As I mentioned earlier, the best way to prevent or reduce the need for assistance is employment. Encouraging a job search as part of a TANF application helps ensure that the T in TANF truly is Temporary.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony. On behalf of the department, I urge you to vote Ought to Pass when the bill comes to a vote. In the meantime, I am happy to answer questions.