

**Testimony of Senator Eric Brakey
before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services**

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

April 24, 2017

Representative Hymanson and colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Eric Brakey and I am the state senator for Auburn, New Gloucester, Poland, Minot and Mechanic Falls. I am here today to present LD 33, *An Act To Adjust the Lifetime Limit for the Receipt of TANF Benefits*.

This bill changes the lifetime limit for receiving benefits through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program from 60 months to 36 months. Once an adult has received TANF assistance for 36 months, unless the adult has been exempted or granted an extension by the department, the family unit in which the adult is a member is ineligible for assistance. This will reduce total benefits paid out in a given year, resulting in accrued savings for the State.

Since the Clinton-era welfare reforms on the federal level, states have been able to set time limits. Only in 2011 did Maine catch up with most other states across the nation, setting a time limit of five years.

Many of our New England neighbors have shorter time limits. Massachusetts and Rhode Island have 24 month time limits. Connecticut has a time limit of 21 months.

This proposal would set Maine's time limit at 36 months. Three years is plenty of time to get on track and get on your feet.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program is designed to be temporary. It is supposed to be a short-term hand-up to those falling on hard times, not a long-term solution. For those able-bodied and capable of work, there is a fine line between helping and enabling. Long time limits on this temporary program can rob people of their ambition and their initiative, setting them back instead of moving them forward.

Let's set time limits that encourage proactivity.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to take any questions.