



Preble Street

Turning Hunger and Homelessness into Opportunity and Hope

Florence House

Food Programs

Lighthouse Shelter

Logan Place

Maine Hunger

Initiative & Advocacy

Resource Center

Teen Center

Veterans Housing Services

March 25, 2014

Good afternoon Senator Craven, Representative Farnsworth, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Amy Regan Gallant and I am the Advocacy Coordinator at Preble Street. Preble Street urges you to vote against LDs 1815, 1820, 1822 and 1842. Each of these four bills would have devastating impact on Maine's most vulnerable families.

LD 1815 requires TANF applicants to apply for three jobs in order to be eligible for benefits. Preble Street's Employment Caseworkers assist clients in the job search, application and training process, and can attest to the difficulties of meeting such as requirement. Similarly, LD 1842 would eliminate good cause provisions for people who are unable to meet eligibility requirements due to disability, lack of transportation, and other significant and unavoidable barriers. LD 1842 also eliminates Parents as Scholars, cutting a critical pathway of ending chronic poverty through education. If we truly want to make TANF a more effective program, we should be enhancing such opportunities instead of eliminating them.

LDs 1820 and 1822 would prohibit TANF recipients from using EBT benefits across state lines, and further restrict EBT purchases, respectively. Preble Street Maine Hunger Initiative is strongly opposed to both of these provisions. EBT restrictions already exist, and there is simply no justification for determining in which state benefits can be used. Why is it that we only care where people are shopping, if they are poor? Additionally, we certainly want EBT cards from other states to be used in our local businesses, so why create a restriction for our own?

These four bills restrict, dictate, eliminate and judge Maine families who struggle to make ends meet. If these bills are approved, what else is there to keep these families afloat? Many may receive support through the Food Supplement Program, which has been cut twice in the past four months. Many may access food pantries or soup kitchens to make ends meet. Preble Street served 17% more meals last year than the previous year. We are running out of plates and chairs, and people are eating while sitting on the floor. 50% more Mainers are hungry today than 10 years ago. These bills will only exacerbate these critical problems, and are distracting from the necessary dialogue about true solutions to end poverty for families in Maine.

Finally, I want to tell you about a phone call I received last night. A friend called me and said she had just heard on the news that "anti-poverty activists were

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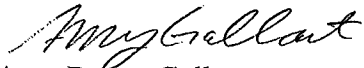
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preparing to oppose these bills” and I have to say I was so disappointed to hear that. This isn’t an anti-poverty issue. In the face of such devastating proposals, the State House should be flooded with teachers, parents, employers, business owners, because this isn’t an anti-poverty issue, it’s an issue about what it means to be living and working in Maine, and it’s an issue about fundamental human dignity.

Preble Street urges you to vote against LDs 1815, 1820, 1822, and 1842. Thank you.

On behalf of Preble Street,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Amy Regan Gallant".

Amy Regan Gallant
Preble Street Advocacy Coordinator