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Testimony of Rick McCarthy

To the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In Opposition to

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

LD 477, An Act To Prevent Long-term Welfare Dependency

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

LD 1052, An Act To Allow Drug Testing Prior to Providing Welfare Benefits

LD 1075, An Act To Eliminate Drug Use Among Welfare Recipients

LD 1418, An Act To Ban the Purchase of Retail Marijuana and Retail Marijuana Products with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program Benefits

April 24, 2017

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Rick McCarthy and I am testifying today on behalf of the Maine Community Action Association (MCAA).

MCAA is comprised of Maine's ten community action programs (CAPs), including Penquis. The CAP's mission is to eliminate and alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty by assisting low-income individuals to move toward self-sufficiency. Each year we serve 200,000 Maine residents providing a variety of services, including Head Start and child care, housing assistance, transportation services, home heating assistance, home repair and weatherization. MTA is a professional association providing leadership, resources, support, and technical assistance to transit agencies throughout Maine.

MCAA strongly believes that positive welfare reforms are possible and necessary. These are reforms that provide assistance to encourage low-income families to permanently rise out of poverty. Unfortunately, the bills before you

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now move in the opposite direction. They would put in place arbitrary limits on access to TANF, harming the families and children that TANF is intended to support.

LD 33 would limit TANF to 36 months. MCAA works with families over many months and sometimes years. Some of these families progress fairly quickly, but many take many months to get the education they need and secure stable employment. It is not realistic to expect all families can achieve that in 36 months. The federal standard of 60 months is reasonable and should be maintained.

LD 1017 would eliminate all good cause exceptions for missing work. MCAA believes all the current exceptions are reasonable and necessary. We oppose this proposal which would have a significant negative impact on many families.

LD 1072 and 1075 seek to prevent anyone with a substance use disorder from accessing TANF. That is not the approach that should be taken. It will result in negative impacts on TANF applicants and their children. Children with parents struggling with substance use disorder are obviously negatively impacted by that behavior. TANF benefits can help improve their lives by providing resources for basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. With regard to the parents, MCAA agrees with the sponsors of these bills that public policy should encourage TANF recipients to cease using illegal drugs. However, we do not believe the approach in these bills will be effective. An effective approach will connect parents with treatment while providing other supports, such as TANF, to help them stabilize life for themselves and their children.

LD 1418 is premature given that the creation of a retail market in marijuana has been put on hold by the Legislature. MCAA's position on the use of TANF funds is generally that TANF recipients are the best judges of the ways to legally spend their funds. We see that as a fundamentally conservative idea, providing as much agency and control to individuals as possible.

Thank you for your time and attention today. I would be happy to take any questions.