



Testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services Regarding

LD 336, An Act to Amend the Requirements of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program

LD 481, An Act to Promote Workforce Participation

LD 1302, An Act to Increase Workforce Participation in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Other Assistance Programs

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Dan Coyne, and I am Senior Vice President, Community Impact at United Way of Greater Portland. I am here to testify in support of LDs 336, 481, and 1302 on behalf of United Way of Eastern Maine, United Way of Greater Portland, United Way of Oxford County, and United Way of York County.

United Ways are a committed partner in moving people up a financial stability continuum, and we support various agencies, programs, and strategies to do so. Ensuring strong income supports that work for people are one such strategy.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is one of those income supports. TANF is only available to families with children, and provides critical assistance for low-income working Maine parents. Families struggling to get out of poverty face multiple significant barriers to employment, including higher than average rates of domestic violence; lack of safe, affordable child care; transportation; disability; lack of education or job skills; and limited educational or training opportunities.¹ Due to such barriers faced by Maine parents in need of temporary assistance, TANF policies should facilitate and reward an individual's pursuit of employment and education, and help them access community resources that can help them build a path to stability.

We support LDs 336, 481, and 1302 because we believe they modestly seek to address the root causes of poverty. Specifically, these bills collectively address housing costs, which can represent a disproportionate and unaffordable percent of a household's expenses; eliminate disincentives to earning additional income; and address transportation issues, which can cripple a household's ability to maintain employment and meet other needs. Housing and transportation are critical considerations in a family's financial stability picture.

We recognize that you and your colleagues have enormous challenges in front of you, but we hope you will find a way to balance accountability, efficiency, and support for the most vulnerable members of our community. We are a committed partner, but we and the programs and services we help fund cannot do it alone. Indeed, we welcome the opportunity to work with the State and other interested organizations to assess the current system and recommend improvements without leaving behind our most vulnerable neighbors.

For these reasons we respectfully encourage you to support LDs 336, 481, and 1302.

Thank you for your leadership and service.

¹ "Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness." The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, June 2015.
http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_OpeningDoors_Amendment2015_FINAL.pdf.