

Maine Women's Lobby

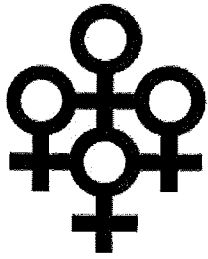
THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Testimony of Danna Hayes in Opposition to LD 368

Senator Brakey, Representative Gattine, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Danna Hayes and I am the Director of Public Policy for the Maine Women's Lobby. We speak on behalf of Maine's 678,000 women and girls. I am here to oppose LD 368, but we also oppose other limitations to needy families' access to life-saving assistance.

We are very concerned about the effects this bill would have on struggling women and their families. The vast majority of Mainers who use the Temporary Aid for Needy Families, or TANF, are single moms supporting themselves and their children. After the implementation of the 60 month time limit for use of TANF, Maine Equal Justice Partners and Sandra Butler, a professor at University of Maine at Orono, surveyed families who were cut off from benefits after reaching the time limit. The most recent follow-up of these families shows some concerning patterns. 40% of the people surveyed said that their families had no income after losing access to TANF. The remaining participants reported that they brought in very little income- the median income was \$260 a month. Nearly 70% of those families reported having to go to a food bank or food pantry, 35% had a utility shut off, 14% were evicted or lost their home and 9% stated that they were now homeless.ⁱ This is especially concerning since all of these families necessarily have children. Research has shown that when children experience extreme poverty in their early years, they suffer from poorer educational outcomes, physical and mental health than their economically stable counterparts.ⁱⁱ

For families who have lost access to TANF and are facing imminent disaster, including hunger, no heat in the wintertime, and homelessness, general assistance is truly the safety net of last resort. These situations are exactly the kinds of dire circumstances the program is designed to address. Forcing mothers and their children into hunger or homeless does nothing to teach them a lesson about personal responsibility. It does nothing to teach them how to get or maintain a job. It does nothing to address the reasons they are struggling in the first place. There are many ways to truly help families out of poverty. Assistance with employment barriers, child care, transportation and education make it possible for families to leave public assistance permanently through their own efforts and well-targeted evidence-based supports. Simply removing any opportunity for assistance in the most dire of emergencies just punishes women and their children for needing and asking for help. We hope you will vote ought not to pass, and in exchange, consider opportunities to create pathways out of poverty for women and their families.



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ⁱ Butler, S., *TANF Time limits and Maine Families: Consequences of Withdrawing the Safety Net*.
<http://www.mejp.org/sites/default/files/TANF-Study-SButler-Feb2013.pdf>

ⁱⁱ *The Effects of Poverty, Hunger and Homelessness on Children and Youth*. American Psychological Association.
<https://www.apa.org/pi/families/poverty.aspx?item=6>