



STATE OF MAINE  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
HOUSE REPUBLICAN OFFICE  
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

KENNETH WADE FREDETTE  
HOUSE REPUBLICAN LEADER

Office: (207)287-1440  
Fax: (207)287-1449  
E-Mail: [fredlaw@myfairpoint.net](mailto:fredlaw@myfairpoint.net)

**Testimony of House Republican Leader Ken Fredette**

**In Support Of**

**LD 1815, "An Act To Require a Work Search for Job-ready Applicants for Benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program."**

Senator Craven, Representative Farnsworth, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Ken Fredette. I serve as the House Republican Leader and am proud to represent House District 25, which includes Corinna, Exeter, Newport, Plymouth, and part of Corinth.

I am pleased to be here today as the sponsor of LD 1815, "An Act To Require a Work Search for Job-ready Applicants for Benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program."

I introduced this bill originally last fall because Maine's welfare system is broken and something must be done. I think we can all agree, regardless of party, that we should encourage people to value work over welfare and that transitioning welfare recipients to fulfilling jobs should be the ultimate goal.

To that end, this bill would require that job-ready applicants of the TANF program apply for at least three jobs before receiving benefits. I want to be clear on a few points. This requirement would apply only to individuals who fall within the Department's classification of "job-ready"—meaning they are able-bodied and not in any kind of immediate danger.

Further, it simply requires TANF applicants to apply for jobs and to submit the names and contact information of the employers with whom they have applied. This requirement is similar to the verifiable work search record that must be kept by those receiving unemployment insurance. Applicants may apply for work in any manner of ways, including online or in person.

The work-search-before-welfare requirement is important both in principle and in practice. Hardworking taxpayers are tired of providing benefits to those who either don't need them or take advantage of them, and as a matter of principle, those who are able to work should be expected to put in an effort to ask for work before asking for welfare.

Practically speaking, in many of the 19 states where this law has been enacted—from liberal Vermont to conservative Georgia—they have seen decreases in the number of people applying for TANF benefits. This tells us that there may be some people out there who are able to work but who don't want to search for a job. Frankly, this is a sentiment I hear from my constituents all the time.

It's unfortunate because there are many truly needy people out there who want to work but just need help. Maine taxpayers are willing to help them. But the looser our welfare system is, the more people grow tired of funding it, and that is ultimately detrimental to our neediest citizens. Let's bring some accountability to our welfare system and not wear down Maine taxpayers' tolerance for funding it.

One important thing I hope the committee will consider in work session on this bill are the federal fines racked up by Maine's TANF system. We have heard a lot about the \$13 million in fines imposed by the federal government from 2007 to 2010—fines imposed because only about 10 percent of two-adult households receiving TANF meet the federal work requirements. We have heard about these fines within the context of the bill to eliminate work search exceptions, but this bill to require an upfront work search requirement would also improve Maine's TANF compliance rate and prevent future federal penalties.

Finally, I'd like to add that I understand the perils of poverty. I lived it myself growing up in Washington County, where my father struggled to support his large family through cold Maine winters. When I was a kid, welfare benefits were a little harder to come by, and you didn't see the intergenerational culture of dependency that you see today. Welfare wasn't a lifestyle. It was something that people avoided because they saw it as a last resort.

I offer this bill as a true, good faith attempt to gain bipartisan support for welfare reform. If there is something the Committee would like to amend, I would welcome any suggestion. Let's have a conversation about welfare reform.

With that, I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.