



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Good afternoon, Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson, and 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 are a nonprofit, nonpartisan, statewide membership organization devoted to raising the economic, social, and political status of Maine's 678,000 women and girls.

I am here in opposition to LDs 33, 477 and 1017.

The overwhelming majority of the Mainers using the Temporary Aid for Needy Families program (TANF) are women and many are single mothers. These are families who often struggle with multiple barriers to gainful employment, including higher than average rates of domestic violence, disability, lack of access to child care, transportation, or limited education.

Regarding LD 33, we are very concerned about the effects this bill would have on struggling women and their families. After the implementation of the 60 month time limit for use of TANF, researchers surveyed families who were cut off from benefits after reaching the time limit.ⁱ The research showed 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 percent of those families reported having to go to a food bank or food pantry, 35 percent had a utility shut off, 14 percent were evicted or lost their home and 9 percent stated that they were now homeless. This is especially concerning since the children in these households are subjected to the repercussions of these policy decisions right along with their parents. 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.

In reference to LD 1017: particularly because of the difficult circumstances that TANF families face, we are deeply concerned with the repeal of all "good cause" protections that would prevent families from losing assistance through no fault of their own. While domestic violence is specifically enumerated in the bill as the single remaining exemption, we know that the nature of domestic violence often leaves little or no documentation to meet the verification qualifications described in the proposed language. Only slightly more than half of intimate partner physical violence is ever reportedⁱⁱ, and only 34 percent who are injured seek medical attentionⁱⁱⁱ. Forcing victims to jump through extra hoops in order to provide evidence of their abuse will likely operate to prevent some from seeking much needed financial help – help that could ultimately assist them and their children in achieving independence from an abuser.

In regards to LD 477, the Alternative Aid program is needed when a family is in an immediate crisis— whether it's domestic violence, transportation failure or facing homelessness from an eviction, applicants are facing a situation that would prevent them from obtaining or maintaining employment. The aid is necessary to prevent catastrophic consequences of unemployment under their current conditions. The program exists to help in situations where immediate but short-term help can prevent more serious consequences. Putting barriers to seeking this immediate help negates the purpose of the program.

Given these concerns, we hope you will vote ought not to pass. Thank you.

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

ⁱⁱ http://www.maine.gov/dps/cim/crime_in_maine/2013pdf/Crime%202013.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://ncadv.org/files/National%20Statistics%20Domestic%20Violence%20NCADV.pdf>