



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services  
**Opposing LD33 - An Act to Adjust the Lifetime Limit for the Receipt of TANF Benefits**  
Cross Building Room 209, April 24, 2017, 12:00pm

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jane Field and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches, whose nine member denominations represent more than 550 local congregations across the state. I am here on the Council's behalf to offer testimony opposing LD 33.

But it isn't only on behalf of the Council that I speak. Our faith and scriptures compel us to speak in solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, the hungry, the vulnerable—those who are too often without a voice here, those who know first-hand what it's like to try to provide food, a warm house, clothing, medicine, transportation and other basic necessities for your family when you're living in deep poverty (on an income of just \$10,000 a year or less for a single parent with two children). As people of faith, we believe our society is judged by how well we care for the least, the lost and the last. And so the Maine Council of Churches speaks in solidarity with them, and on behalf of Maine's faith communities who see the effects of the so-called "reforms" of our safety net in recent years that have plunged more of our state's children into poverty (at a rate 8 times higher than the national average). Churches see these effects because we are on the front lines, responding to families in desperate need who have nowhere else to turn:

- Like the church who struggles to operate an "essentials pantry" to provide people in need with cleaning products and personal hygiene items they cannot otherwise afford. One of the people this pantry serves is a veteran's widow with five children who can't afford to pay for her prescription medications, food for her family, and basics like toothpaste and dish detergent. Another is a mom whose young child has a cleft palate. The woman injured her shoulder, was out of work for three months, and couldn't pay the rent. They were evicted and had to move into a small mobile home with her aging parents.
- And there's the church whose pastor learned last fall of a family living in a nearby garage. A father and his two children with nowhere else to go spent this past winter living in a relative's one-car garage outfitted with a wood burning stove for heat, and a toilet and sink whose pipes were in constant danger of freezing. The father recently had to have all of his teeth extracted, and can't afford the clothes and supplies his children will need for school this fall. The church is trying to help take care of them but it's stretching their limited financial and volunteer resources to the edge to do so.

These families and thousands more like them all around our state have serious mental and physical health problems, lower educational levels, and other significant barriers to employment that mean when they reach TANF time limits they do not—they cannot leave poverty behind. Instead, they remain deeply economically insecure and their children suffer. Further restricting the short time that they are eligible to receive TANF benefits will not help them. It only means that life will just get harder sooner, and that more of Maine's children will go without very basic things sooner, like a home to live in or enough food to eat. And please do not assume that our churches could ever begin to meet that kind of need if the state stepped back from its responsibility to do so. We cannot even meet the desperate need we already see every day.

For these reasons, the Maine Council of Churches urges you NOT to reduce the TANF lifetime limit from 60 months to 36 months.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony today on behalf of our brothers and sisters in need and on behalf of churches in Maine who stand with them.