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Testimony of Kate Brogan, Maine Family Planning
On behalf of the Maine Alliance for Reproductive Freedom

In Opposition to

**LD 368, An Act To Integrate the State's General Assistance and Temporary
Assistance for Needy Families Programs**

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

April 15, 2015

Senator Brakey, Representative Gattine and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Kate Brogan and I am here on behalf of the Maine Alliance for Reproductive Freedom to speak in opposition to LD 368. While I will limit my testimony to LD 368, the Maine Alliance for Reproductive Freedom also opposes the other bills considered today which propose to set arbitrary limits on struggling families' access to necessary supports.

Formerly known at the Maine Choice Coalition, the Maine Alliance for Reproductive Freedom is an alliance of organizations and individuals working for all people's right to self-determination over their reproductive lives, including the right to have children, to not have children, and to parent the children we have in safe and healthy environments. For too many Maine parents, the ability to raise children in safety and dignity may mean having to seek public supports like TANF and General Assistance.

This bill targets TANF recipients who need assistance beyond the state's 60 month time limit, and seeks to prevent them from falling onto the last protection of the safety net, General Assistance. The people we are talking about are, overwhelmingly, women trying to raise their

children, very often alone, and very often managing a disability in the process. The benefits in question put food on the table and keep a roof over their children's heads. Cutting off these last-resort benefits will not help these families rise out of poverty. Forcing families into homelessness or other unsafe situations is not going to make it more likely that these parents will be able to find good jobs that will enable them to build better lives for their children. To the contrary, the long-term negative effects of childhood poverty, hunger and homelessness are well documented. To rise out of poverty, the heads of these households need access to education and training, and quality, affordable child care, not punishment.

1 in 5 Maine kids live in poverty, and 1 in 4 don't have enough food on the table. Now is not the time to restrict access to these most basic supports for these struggling families.