

Testimony of Rachel Ridenour
In Opposition to LD 1815 - An Act To Require a Work Search for Job-ready Applicants for
Benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program
March 25, 2014

Good afternoon Senator Craven, Representative Farnsworth and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Rachel Ridenour and I live in Eustis with my two children and my partner. I no longer receive TANF as my partner has a good job at a local mill but I wanted to share information about why it would have been very difficult for me to have applied for 3 jobs prior to applying for TANF benefits. I believe that my experience is shared by many other families who have applied for TANF.

I first applied for TANF benefits to help me leave an abusive relationship with my husband. He was not a bad person but was unable to handle the grief and stress resulting from the death of one of our children and he became increasingly volatile. Child Protective Services became involved and they made it clear that he was not to be left alone with our remaining child.

I wanted to work but had no way to pay for child care even if I'd been offered a job. The pay I would have received would not have both paid my rent and paid for child care, not to mention all the other expenses of maintaining a household. I investigated other options for child care but came up empty. It would not have been fair to an employer had I applied for a job and been offered it, knowing that without help paying for child care I couldn't accept the job. I was left with no choice for my family but to apply for TANF.

Fortunately, TANF gave me the security I needed to leave the abusive relationship. Knowing that I'd have enough income to pay rent and that I'd have child care when I found work, gave me the confidence I needed to make my life and the life of my son, better.

I urge you not to add additional hurdles to people in their attempt to escape domestic violence. It's already a very difficult decision to make and programs like TANF are one of the few lifelines that allow people to believe there might be an alternative.

I'm now in a much better place with my life. My partner and I have a new baby, and I'm working towards a degree through the University of Maine at Augusta. But I'm very grateful that I was able to get TANF for the short while that I needed it to get my life headed in the right direction. Please don't take that opportunity away from others.