

January 30, 2024

Testimony on **LD 1877 – *An Act to Reduce the Number of Children Living in Deep Poverty in Maine***

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments in support of LD 1877. My name is Chris McLaughlin, and I am humbled to be the Executive Director of the Maine Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW ME). On behalf of our over 1000 members here in Maine, I'm honored to share thoughts on this important piece of proposed legislation. I also am a licensed clinical social worker with almost 25 years of experience providing and leading behavioral health services across a variety of treatment settings here in Maine. Most of my clinical career has been spent supporting children and families residing here in our great state.

Simply put, LD 1877 will ensure that more parents and their children can meet their everyday needs. LD 1877 will allow more Mainers to access the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Research data shows that 7% of Maine children are living in deep poverty (defined by a family income of less than \$14,000 per year). TANF is supposed to provide monthly income support to them, and connect parents with training, education, and jobs to put economic security within reach. However, Maine's maximum grant for a family of three is just \$665 per month (as of September 2023), the lowest grant of any New England state and equal to less than 35% of the federal poverty level. We know that the impacts of child poverty are far-reaching, including low academic achievement and behavioral health concerns including exposure to the trauma associated with deep poverty. Poverty can affect a child's physical, social, emotional, and behavioral development. In 2020, only 1 in 5 Maine kids in poverty were getting monthly income support through TANF. With expanded eligibility, the TANF program can reach more children and families who are in need of these supports. This allows Maine to access more federal funds to support families in need in our state.

In conclusion, I urge the board to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1877. For Maine's kids, communities, and economy to reach their potential, we must invest more in families. When families succeed, it has ripple effects in our schools, governments, and downtowns. Parents who have enough food in the fridge and a safe place to call home and are able to meet their kids' needs—providing clothing, shoes, school supplies, and more—can put more focus on training, education, and the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration,



Chris McLaughlin, MSW, LCSW  
Executive Director, Maine Chapter – NASW