

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES 2 STATE HOUSE STATION AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002 (207) 287-1400 TTY: (207) 287-4469

Melvin Newendyke 84 Small Road Litchfield, ME 04350 Residence: (207) 268-2553 E-Mail: mln@fairpoint.net State House E-Mail: RepMel.Newendyke@legislature.maine.gov

> Testimony on LD 1064, "Resolve, to Establish the Task Force on Independence from Public Assistance"

Representative Mel Newendyke

May 3, 2013 Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Craven, Representative Farnsworth, distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am State Representative Mel Newendyke and I am proud to represent House District 80 – Litchfield, Monmouth, and Wales. Today I am here to introduce LD 1064, "*Resolve, to Establish the Task Force on Independence from Public Assistance.*" This resolve asks for the formation of a committee whose responsibility would be to determine if and how those who receive welfare benefits would be able to transition off those benefits without undue financial harm to themself or their family.

I would like to begin by stating that I firmly believe that welfare should be a hand up, not a lifelong handout. To be sure, there are those among us who desperately need the assistance, and I recognize that. However, it is my hope that Maine can find a way to revise our welfare rules to provide Mainers a way to transition off of welfare, and to motivate people to succeed at their jobs without fear of losing welfare benefits entirely because they receive a raise at work.

As members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am sure you are well acquainted with the eligibility levels for the various programs administered by the Department, so I will not delve into those. However, I would like to share some other information and anecdotes with you today.

I have heard from constituents who have worried about this very issue, and I know other representatives have as well, representatives on both sides of the aisle. I had a conversation with a constituent of mine at last summer's Monmouth Fair who described her situation to me – she is on welfare benefits, though she works at the Department of Transportation, but is worried about any increase in pay that would put her in the spot

where she is still unable to provide for her family, but is just enough to make her ineligible for welfare benefits. The task force that this bill would create would study ways to change Maine's welfare policy so that this would not happen, so that Mainers have a motivation to succeed at their jobs without the fear they now have.

The task force would be able to investigate the different, and numerous, federal rules and regulations relating to benefits and how, or if, Maine may be able to make such changes to the rules governing those benefits in our state for this purpose.

In addition, the task force would also want to look at all forms of public assistance including, but not limited to, housing, electric, and heating assistance to determine if these are also affected by some type of income increase.

The idea behind this legislation is not new. During the 124th Legislature, a bill was introduced to put a five-tier transition system into place. And, earlier this session L.D. 78, "An Act to Expand Transitional Assistance," was introduced before this very committee. You'll note that many cosponsors of LD 1064 are from both political parties. This is an issue that affects Mainers all across the state, and is not a political issue. It is about getting Mainers back to work and ensuring that our welfare system is operating effectively and efficiently to serve those most in need.

I have heard from former DHHS employees who have much experience and who believe that a transitional system would be a workable idea – it is just a matter of determining how to best establish such a system.

The legislation establishes the membership of the committee as: two members of the Senate, three members of the House of Representatives, and four members appointed by the Governor who possess expertise in public assistance programs and programs to assist people to achieve employment. One member must represent the Department of Health and Human Services, one member must represent low-income residents of the State, one member must represent employers in the State and one member must represent the Office of the Governor. From this membership we will not only have legislators who will have an understanding of the issues facing the task force, but also about how to proceed legislatively. This is essential, as the task force is directed to suggest legislation to this very committee by December of 2013.

I urge you to unanimously support this bill, and thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.