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Maine Community Action Partnership Opposes LD 784 An Act to Establish Welfare Work Requirements for Able-bodied Adults Without Dependents

April 7, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Megan Hannan, Executive Director of the Maine Community Action Partnership, and we oppose LD 784 An Act to Establish Welfare Work Requirements for Able-bodied Adults Without Dependents.

The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) already has work requirements, although they were relaxed during the pandemic, so this bill is entirely moot. The Federal agency that oversees SNAP also allows flexibility when looking at requiring employment, because as we know the right job is not always available where one lives or can easily travel to. Access to adequate food is a necessity for all of us, and for families with children, even more important. MaineCare and General Assistance may not require its recipients be working, but having access to both makes it much easier and more likely that they are able to work.

I realize the state is in a workforce crisis, we need more workers to keep our businesses going. The answer to that problem is to create and enhance our workforce development programs, our woefully underfunded and outdated transportation systems, our childcare availability and affordability, and to ease the so-called "welfare cliff," which is what may actually disincentivize going to work. When a family makes just a little bit more money, they lose access to more; they may lose childcare subsidies, income supports and SNAP. The family may earn another dollar an hour, but then loses far more and finds itself once again unable to buy food.

We already know the outcome of this bill – we have seen it here and in other states. Creating barriers to supportive programs does not incentivize work. Individuals and families living in poverty spend hours a week meeting with compliance for any and every program they apply for and receive. Programs work at cross purposes; one section of DHHS does not talk to another, requiring the same paperwork from customers again and again; the causes and conditions of poverty are systemic, not a result of personal failings.

You, as the Legislature, run the systems. Please make them work better for people, not more difficult.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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