



MAINE EQUAL JUSTICE

Working to Find Solutions to Poverty and Improving the Lives of People with Low Income in Maine.

Real Reform Must Solve Real Problems

Helping people get good jobs, become independent and be able to take care of their families are important goals for Maine’s welfare system. That means we can’t just make cuts and call them successful “reforms.” Right now Maine’s support system isn’t working as well as it could to deliver opportunities and lift families out of poverty. In the past 5 years, an estimated 100,000 people lost access to food, shelter or medical care here in Maine; that’s more than the total population of Bangor, Augusta, Lewiston, and Presque Isle combined. They lost help and their financial situation did not improve – instead life just got harder. That is not what Maine people want from their welfare system – we need to put in place policies that will make the system smart, fair, and accountable.

Here’s where we are today:

Reduction in Aid 2011-2016	How are Maine Families Faring?
<p>9,000 Maine families¹ including nearly 16,000 children² lost help from the TANF program, which helps families meet their most basic needs and provides employment, education and training services for low-income parents.</p> <p>The percent of Maine children in poverty that receive help from the TANF program has dropped by more than half.³</p>	<p>The percentage of Maine children living in deep poverty—less than \$800 a month for a family of 3—has increased at a rate 8 times greater than the national average.⁴</p>
<p>42,600 Mainers lost food assistance.⁵</p>	<p>Maine has the 3rd highest rate of very low food security in the nation.⁶</p> <p>Hunger has increased in Maine, while it has decreased in the region and the rest of the nation.⁷</p>
<p>More than 40,000 Mainers lost their health insurance through MaineCare and the Elderly Drug Program including seniors, children, working parents, adults under the poverty level, and immigrants.</p>	<p>Maine’s overall health ranking has fallen from 10th best in the nation to 22nd.⁸</p>

These are troubling facts. But, more troubling still is that the Administration’s proposed budget for 2018-2019 offers more of the same, posing even greater risk to Maine children, families and immigrant communities in our State.

Proposed Cut	Likely Consequence
Complete elimination of the General Assistance Program	General Assistance is our State’s most basic safety net. Its elimination would leave thousands of people facing homelessness without a roof over their heads or enough food to eat.
Terminates nearly 25,000 parents and young adults from MaineCare.	This cut would leave a 3-person family with income as low as \$715 a month uninsured. Young adults age 19 and 20 would no longer be eligible for MaineCare regardless of their income unless they were totally disabled. it would increase health care costs for all Maine people; further weaken our labor force and our economy.
Further destabilizing the TANF program by cutting at least another 1,500 children and their families from aid.	This cut would drive even more Maine children into deeper poverty and deprive parents of the education and training opportunities to raise their families out of poverty.
Denial of all help to asylum seekers and other lawfully present immigrants from the SSI, General Assistance, TANF or Food Supplement Program (SNAP).	This would leave hundreds of New Mainers, including children, seniors and those with disabilities without any help to meet their basic needs including food and shelter.

The Administration is proposing these so-called “reforms” alongside massive tax breaks for the wealthiest in our state.

This does not reflect who Maine people are or what they want from our welfare system.

This legislative session offers policy makers the opportunity to change course and enact real reform that will truly improve the lives of thousands of Mainers living in communities throughout our state. Legislators can:

- Learn from the lessons of the past and reject budget proposals that drive more Maine children and families into poverty or deprive working parents and our youngest workers access to basic health care.
- Provide access to health insurance for 70,000 low-income working families, those suffering from addiction without treatment, and others who cannot access health insurance by acting to accept federal funds to expand Medicaid here in Maine.
- Support Speaker Sara Gideon’s bill, An Act to Reduce Child Poverty by Leveraging Investments in Families Today (LIFT), to help lift our youngest Mainers out of poverty. This initiative will stabilize families by ensuring basics like housing and heat, create economic opportunities for families to get ahead, and break down barriers to employment that stand in peoples’ way.

To be sure, times have been tough in our communities, but Maine people have a long history of turning things around when we work together. We know that we are all better off when everyone has the opportunity to live a healthy life; raise children with a roof over their heads and enough food to eat; and the prospect of contributing to their communities and our economy. We should hold our welfare system accountable to those goals, and reject budget proposals that undermine those goals.

Maine Equal Justice will work hard to make these things happen, but we know that they WON'T happen unless we all work together. That's why we're asking you to take these two steps:

1. **Call your state representative and state senator.** Ask them to **support** budget proposals that will help struggling families lift themselves out of poverty, while at the same time creating opportunities for people to find good jobs, take care of their families, and be productive members of their communities. Tell them to **reject** budget proposals that will destabilize the safety net, drive more children and families into poverty and make it more difficult for families to get back on their feet.
2. **Stay in touch!** Visit www.mejp.org to sign up for our email list. We will not flood your inbox! But we will send you timely and important updates and let you know about opportunities to take action during the legislative session.

Together we have what it takes to build a better Maine that doesn't leave anyone behind. We know that Maine can support and create opportunity for all Maine people.

(Endnotes)

1. Information provided to the Legislative Committee on Health and Human Services by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, An Orientation to the Office of Family Independence, January 1917.
2. Kids Count Data Center: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/1564-children-receiving-tanf?loc=21&loct=2#detailed/2/any/false/869,36,868,867,133/any/12826,3335>; Maine Equal Justice Partners analysis of Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Family Independence, Geographic Distribution of Programs and Benefits reports for 2016 <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofi/reports/2016/index.html>
3. Kids Count Data Center: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/1564-children-receiving-tanf?loc=21&loct=2#detailed/2/any/false/869,36,868,867,133/any/12826,3335>; <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofi/reports/2016/index.html>
4. 2015 American Community Survey data analysis by Maine Center for Economic Policy
5. This figure accounts for a natural decrease in SNAP use that may have occurred between 2011-2016 due to regional economic conditions. It considers the percent change in the number of SNAP recipients during this period in all FNS New England Region states except for Maine (6.5%), and subtracts this amount from the percent change in Maine alone (23.7%). It assumes that any balance of the SNAP reduction in Maine during this period is due to policy changes (17.2%). USDA state-level annual data for the SNAP program: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>
6. USDA Economic Research Service, *Household Food Security in the United States in 2015*: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=79760>
7. USDA Economic Research Service, Maine: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/state-fact-sheets.aspx>
8. National: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics/>
9. This is according to the United Health Scorecard that analyzes a comprehensive set factors to provide a holistic picture of the health of Maine people. (<http://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/2016-annual-report/state/ME>)