

Annual Report 2012

MAINE
EQUAL



JUSTICE
PARTNERS

Finding solutions to poverty and improving the lives of
people with low income in Maine

Taking a Stand for Justice

As Maine struggles to recover from the worst economic downturn in decades, inequality continues to grow as more and more families are left behind. According to recent data from the American Community Survey, slightly more than 14 percent of Maine's population lives in poverty – for a family of three that means an income of \$19,090 a year or just \$1,591 a month.

Working families are struggling, and the cold, hard truth is that those who suffer the most are single parents with children under five – nearly half of these families live in poverty. **It doesn't have to be this way.**

Over the years, Maine Equal Justice Partners has been inspired by the families we work with. Despite daily challenges that few of us can imagine, they stand up and speak out against policies that would hurt working families and disrupt what little stability and security they and their peers have.

With the start of the 2013 legislative session around the corner comes a new opportunity to address persistent poverty and growing inequality. This new Legislature will make important decisions that will affect every family in Maine: providing health care to 44,000 low-income Mainers without insurance through the Affordable Care Act; expanding education and training to help lift families out of poverty; and strengthening General Assistance, Maine's lifeline of last resort during hard times.



*Candlelight vigil at State House, January 24, 2012
– taking a stand for justice*

“Lift up your light if you still believe that public budgets are about more than numbers. They are about human potential and human lives.”

Reverend Jill Job Saxby

As the legislature addresses these and many other critical issues it is important for all of us to remember that we rise or fall together. As Thurgood Marshall said, “[n]one of us got where we are solely by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. We got here because somebody – a parent, a teacher, an Ivy League crony or a few nuns – bent down and helped us pick up our boots.”

Now is the time to stand up and make your voice heard. Together we can change the conversation -- to speak without apology against poverty. It's time to break dangerous stereotypes. It's time to fight against policies based on anecdotes and rhetoric. It's time to make justice a reality for Maine's working families.

Maine Equal Justice in Action

Research and Advocacy

Through research and policy analysis, legislative and administrative advocacy, MEJP conducted an aggressive campaign in 2012 to protect health care benefits for people with very low income.

“New study disputes administration on childless adults”

Bangor Daily News, January 9, 2012

With proposals to cut MaineCare for low-income adults in the Administration’s supplemental budget, Maine Equal Justice issued a study about the impact of health care coverage for this group of people in January 2012. In MEJP’s ongoing effort to inform public policy through facts, not anecdotes or stereotypes, *Preserving MaineCare Coverage for Low-income Adults: Smart Policy-Common Sense* assessed the impact of coverage for these individuals and the consequences, should they lose access to care.

Contrary to the rhetoric dominating the debate, the study found that Maine is not an outlier among states in providing health care coverage for low-income childless adults; 19 other states do so. The people served by the program are not predominantly “young” or “able-bodied”; many have serious medical conditions that affect their activities and ability to function. Eliminating their health insurance would make it much more difficult for many people to regain their health, maintain employment or return to the workforce.

“Eliminating health insurance for this population won’t make their health care needs go away. Policy makers face many hard decisions, but before they decide to eliminate this program they should understand the implications.”

Dr. Laurel Coleman

MEJP’s advocacy in concert with the voices of many who would have been directly affected by the proposed cut, was effective in preventing elimination of coverage for this MaineCare group. Instead, enrollment in the program was frozen, allowing adults with very low income to keep their coverage for now.

“LePage efforts to eliminate health care fails legal scrutiny”

MEJP press release, August 9, 2012

Cuts in health care coverage for people with low income including working parents, young adults, the elderly and people with disabilities, were signed into law in 2012. More than 27,000 individuals would lose access to care under the new law, although the State needs federal approval to implement the cuts. In August, the Administration sought an amendment to Maine’s Medicaid state plan from the federal government in order to proceed.

MEJP continued to fight these short-sighted policies at the federal level with a letter to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, disputing legal claims made by the state in its efforts to deny health insurance to these MaineCare members. In MEJP’s press release regarding our letter to Secretary Sebelius, Executive Director Sara Gagné-Holmes stated:

“While the governor has threatened to sue if he doesn’t get what he wants, the U.S. Supreme Court has upheld the provisions of the Affordable Care Act that prevent states from reducing eligibility for Medicaid. His arguments fail on their merits and his request should be denied.”

The state did proceed with a lawsuit, seeking to force the federal government to expedite approval of Maine’s request. The First Circuit Court of Appeals rejected Maine’s case, stating that the facts didn’t warrant an expedited review.

“MaineCare provides many of us hope that someday we can get back on our feet again. I supported the Medicaid program over the years by paying my taxes. Now I am one of the many who need some help. Please don’t make these cuts.”

MaineCare member testimony



Charles Dingman, Christine Hastedt and Robyn Merrill with Preble Street’s Director of Advocacy, Donna Yellen. MEJP was the recipient of Preble Street’s 2012 Community Partner Award.

Litigation and Outreach

Policy decisions made by the 125th Legislature weakened the safety net for our most vulnerable neighbors, including many of Maine's immigrants who are living here lawfully. MaineCare coverage, Food Supplement and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits were cut for hundreds of immigrant families. MEJP took action on several fronts, providing direct assistance to immigrant communities, producing educational materials in multiple languages and seeking equal protection through the courts.

“Suit fights law cutting MaineCare coverage”

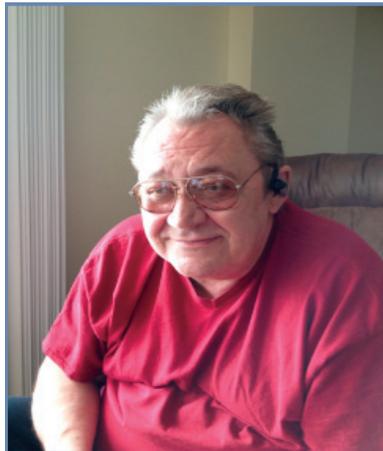
Kennebec Journal, April 20, 2012

Hans Bruns, age 65, is battling a rare form of cancer without health insurance coverage and suffers excruciating pain from his illness. He is the plaintiff in a case filed by Maine Equal Justice Partners, the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, and Jennifer Archer of Kelly, Rimmel & Zimmerman in April 2012.

“Sometimes it takes a single heart-rending personal story to get things moving to right a wrong. That is what’s going on in the case of a legal immigrant, Hans Bruns of Fort Fairfield.”

Editorial, Bangor Daily News
April 25, 2012

Hans contacted Maine Equal Justice in late 2011 when he realized that his MaineCare coverage no longer enabled him to receive the medical services he so desperately needed to treat his condition. A resident of Fort Fairfield, he lost his MaineCare coverage because he was not born in the United States. A state law, passed in 2011, terminated



Hans Bruns

MaineCare benefits for people from other countries such as Hans and imposed a five-year waiting period before they can qualify for coverage. As of this writing, Hans' condition has deteriorated considerably; he is now terminally ill.

The lawsuit against the Maine Department of Health and Human Services is on behalf of Hans and the 500 other lawful immigrants who lost their health care coverage in October 2011. We contend that denying coverage violates the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution because it treats immigrants who are living here legally differently from U.S. citizens. The lawsuit seeks to restore access to MaineCare for these individuals.

“Immigrants may be hit hardest by MaineCare cuts, tighter food stamp rules”

Lewiston Sun Journal
January 6, 2012

The news media had it right, immigrant families were hit hard by the cuts to Maine's safety net programs. MEJP saw an immediate need and took action, becoming a resource for Maine's immigrant communities and the providers who serve them.

Informational tools – in print and on the web

MEJP prepared several fact sheets about Maine's safety net programs, materials such as *What You Should Know About Public Programs*, *MaineCare for Legal Immigrants*, *TANF for Legal Immigrants*, *Food Stamps for Legal Immigrants and SSI and General Assistance for Legal Immigrants*. These materials and others have been translated into eight languages: French, Creole, Spanish, Arabic, Swahili, Farsi, Kinyarwanda, and Somali, to meet the needs of Maine's immigrant communities. They are also available on our website: www.mejp.org.

Community outreach and training

As part of a broader coalition of immigrant rights advocates, MEJP reached out to leaders of some of Maine's immigrant populations, providers serving immigrant families, and other groups working with these communities. Through community forums, training sessions and individual meetings in the homes of immigrant families, we helped hundreds of people understand what resources and supports are available in Maine today.



Robyn Merrill meets with members of the Somali community in Portland

Making a Difference in Maine's Communities

What people are saying...

I am overwhelmed and grateful for the help MEJP provided to me and my family. Until we spoke with you, we had almost given up all hope as there seemed to be no help out there for us. It is such a relief to be able to stop the foreclosure on our home, pay our bills and know that we have some money coming in each month. I have been so anxious about our situation. I can't thank you enough.

Judith – Exeter, Maine

I wanted to say thank you for providing us with such a great presentation at the Healthy Families Network Collaborative meeting. It is wonderful to have a resource like MEJP to help us as we assist families to navigate all of the changes in the systems of care.

Colleen - Topsham, Maine

I needed to thank you again for going above and beyond in your daily responsibilities. We are living a nightmare and peace is very hard to find. The information you obtained were the last pieces I needed to put the paperwork together to end our financial crisis. There have been two individuals that have stood out in our life this week and you are one of them.

Arthur – Lincolnville, Maine

Attorney Jeffrey Young Receives 2012 Equal Justice Hero Award



Jeff Young receiving award from Sara Gagné-Holmes

Maine Equal Justice awarded attorney Jeffrey N. Young of the law firm McTeague Higbee with its first Equal Justice Hero Award in January 2012. Young was presented the award for his commitment and conviction in the pursuit of equal justice for all Maine people.

Most notably, Young worked with MEJP, the Disability Rights Center, and the National Health Law Program to file a class action lawsuit against the Maine Department of Health and Human Services on behalf of individuals with cerebral palsy, epilepsy, and other related conditions to ensure they have access to adequate services and living arrangements to allow them to live more independent and fulfilling lives. The case was settled in September 2011 and implementation of the settlement is underway.

MEJP in print and on the web

A sampling of MEJP's publications in 2012 – all can be found on our website: www.mejp.org.

Preserving MaineCare Coverage for Low-Income Adults: Smart Policy – Common Sense
*Budgets Should Be Balanced with Facts, **not** Misperceptions, Fiction and False Savings*
Summary of the DHHS Supplemental Budget Cuts
Changes to the MaineCare Program
Changes to the General Assistance Program
Understanding ASPIRE -TANF: Your Rights and Responsibilities
Parents as Scholars (PaS) Program Guide
Maine's Safety Net: Assisting Families in Times of Need
Medicaid Expansion: An Opportunity for Maine
The Impact of the Supreme Court Decision on the MaineCare Program
So-called Reforms Fail on Promise of a Better Maine



Children at Maine Hunger Coalition Event in Portland



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