



## Legislative Priorities for 2019

### An Act to Reduce Child Poverty by Leveraging Investments so Families can Thrive (LIFT 3.0)

**LIFT 3.0 builds on legislation passed in 2017 and 2018 to increase economic security and opportunity for Maine children and their families.** Child poverty weighs all of us down — it challenges our schools, our health care system, our communities, and our economy. We all have a stake in addressing child poverty here in Maine, not only for children, but also for their families, our communities, our workforce and our state economy. LIFT 3.0 will greatly reduce child poverty today and in the future.

- 1. Real Reform at DHHS so Families can Thrive:** Helping people meet basic needs, get good jobs, and lead safe, healthy, and productive lives are central to the mission of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). LIFT 3.0 will establish a Working Group to review and recommend improvements to the operations of systems and programs at DHHS to more effectively address the needs of Maine families. LIFT 3.0 will also require DHHS to measure and track Maine’s progress related to poverty, food insecurity, and other indicators of child well-being. Setting benchmarks and tracking progress to achieve positive outcomes will create more accountability to improve economic security and opportunity in Maine.
- 2. Pathways to Education so Families can Thrive:** Parents with higher educational levels and earned credentials are better able to sustain economic security for their families. Meanwhile, Maine employers are also looking for people with degrees as Maine faces a workforce shortage. LIFT 3.0 will increase access to the Parents as Scholars (PaS) program that provides low-income parents with access to necessary supports like child care and transportation so they can get a degree or credential to increase their earning capacity. This proposal will allow educational institutions and others to help students sign up for the PaS Program. It would also provide students with professional guidance and support to promote program completion and student success. Finally, the bill will create a working group to continue to make improvements to PaS.
- 3. Pathways to Employment so Families can Thrive:** As it stands, families can face a “benefits cliff” when they transition off Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) into employment. TANF is a federal anti-poverty program that helps families with children meet basic needs and achieve self-sufficiency through education, training, and work supports. The cliff effect occurs when additional wages or hours of work can result in the sudden loss of public assistance that destabilizes a family’s economic security. LIFT 3.0 will mitigate the cliff for families receiving TANF going to work disregarding all earned income for the first 6 months of work; 75% for the next 6 months; and returning to the current disregard after that. It will also keep families whole by ensuring they don’t lose food assistance (SNAP) as a result of work.
- 4. Meet the basics so Families can Thrive:** LIFT 3.0 will also modernize Maine’s TANF program by eliminating the “gross income test,” which is an overall income eligibility threshold that an applicant family cannot exceed to qualify for assistance. Eligibility would be determined in the same manner that is used to assess continued eligibility, which will mean that the program will be better able to provide temporary assistance to meet the basic needs of families with children.

## **An Act to Improve Dental Health for Maine Adults with Low-Incomes**

Experts and community members alike from across the state say a lack of affordable dental care for adults is a serious problem. Poor dental health negatively impacts employability, communication, and social interaction, which together can undermine family economic insecurity. Unmet dental needs come at a human and an economic cost as they also pose considerable financial burden to Maine hospitals.

Currently, MaineCare, Maine's Medicaid program, limits dental care for adults strictly to emergency care necessary to eliminate pain, infection or prevent imminent tooth loss. By comparison, most states (33) provide more extensive dental services for adults including preventive and restorative care.

This bill will ensure that adults with low income can access the dental care they need by doing the following:

- (1) **Coverage:** Include comprehensive preventive, diagnostic and restorative dental care for adults covered by MaineCare; and
- (2) **Access:** Create a dental fee incentive payment to reward dental providers who significantly increase the number of MaineCare children and adults they serve or those who serve a disproportionate share of MaineCare members in their practice.

## **An Act to Restore Services to Help New Mainers Meet Their Basic Needs**

In 2011, the LePage Administration attempted to bar many immigrants in Maine from accessing Maine's anti-poverty programs. As a result, many immigrants including people seeking asylum were no longer able to access health care coverage through MaineCare and it became much harder and more complicated to access food assistance (SNAP) and help with basic needs for children (TANF). This bill will restore access to these programs for immigrants who are lawfully present.

Ultimately, all Maine residents should have access to basic necessities like food in the fridge and a place to call home. No Maine family should go hungry or without a home. This legislation will take us a step closer toward that goal and will result in a more equitable safety net that does discriminate against people based on race, ethnicity, religion, or country of origin.

## **An Act to Protect the Integrity of the MaineCare Program**

Tens of thousands of Mainers rely on Medicaid (MaineCare here in Maine), which provides health care to 265,000 low-income seniors, children, pregnant women, adults, and people with disabilities—that's one in every five Mainers. The Legislature should have the opportunity to weigh in before access to this critical support can be significantly limited. This bill clarifies that absent a change in statute, DHHS may not implement changes in the Medicaid program or State Children's Health Insurance Program that significantly change: 1) enrollment in the program; 2) the scope of covered services; or 3) the funding mechanisms for the program, unless otherwise required by federal law.

**Maine Equal Justice is also supporting the following legislation** (this is not an all-inclusive list):

- **An Act to Move Maine Toward Affordable Healthcare for Everyone**  
This bill would engage stakeholders to create a path toward universal health care for Maine.
- **An Act to Provide All Maine Children with Access to Affordable Health Care**  
This bill would expand access to health care for Maine children up to age 20 who live in families with incomes up to 325% of the federal poverty level through the Medicaid and Child Health Insurance Program utilizing both federal and state funds. It would also ensure that eligible children get benefits more promptly and make access to these programs easier for families.
- **LD 1 – An Act to Protect Health Care Coverage for Maine Families**  
This bill will codify the patient protections outlined at the in the ACA into state law.
- **An Act to Improve Transitional Services for Low-income Families with Children**  
This bill will: (1) increase the effectiveness of Transitional MaineCare so more families have continuity of care; (2) strengthen Transitional Transportation to increase support for working families leaving TANF; (3) Authorize DHHS to increase the amount of Transitional Food assistance for working families to address high rates of hunger; and (4) invest in “Whole Family Economic Security Initiatives” to support post-secondary degrees/credentials, economic supports, and health and well-being leading to two-generational success on the path toward economic security.
- **Legislation to Improve the State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)**  
There are multiple bills that would expand who is eligible to claim the EITC as well as increasing what that credit is in Maine. We will be working with partners to advance these bills in order to help working families move out of poverty.
- **Resolve, To Study the Feasibility of Creating Basic Income Security for Maine People**  
In recognition of our changing economy, the impact of climate change, and the strain these forces put on our public benefit programs, this resolve would study solutions to ensure Mainers have basic income security to meet their everyday needs as our state moves into a new economic future.
- **An Act to Require Fairness in Residential Land Installment Contracts**  
These contracts provide a path to homeownership for people unable to purchase homes through traditional means. The property title doesn’t transfer to the borrower until the end of the contract or when the amount owed is fully paid. Many people end up losing their homes, do not accrue any equity, and take on debt because payments are unaffordable. This bill extends the same rights and protections to these borrowers that people have in the traditional foreclosure process.
- **Legislation to increase support for the Head Start program**  
Maine needs to invest more in this proven program that serves our most disadvantaged children and their families with high-quality, comprehensive education, health, nutrition and social services combined with intensive parent involvement. Head Start has favorable short and long-term effects on economic security and health outcomes.