

Parents as Scholars ~ PaS ~ Program



Written and published by:

Maine Equal Justice Partners, Inc.

126 Sewall Street, Augusta, ME 04330

Phone: (207) 626-7058 ♦ Fax: (207) 621-8148

Toll-free: 1 (866) 626-7059

info@mejp.org

[**www.mejp.org**](http://www.mejp.org)

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**When you are talking to DHHS,
questions can arise.
Feel free to bring this booklet
with you.**



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What is the Parents as Scholars Program?

Student Aid. The Parents as Scholars (PaS) program is a student aid program that helps low-income parents in two or four-year college programs. It was created by the Maine Legislature in 1997 as part of our state's welfare reform plan. PaS is run by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) through the ASPIRE Program. Only parents who are eligible for, but not necessarily receiving, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF, formerly AFDC) are eligible for PaS.



Maine Educational Opportunity Center (MEOC)

Negotiating the higher education system can be confusing. If you would like assistance with deciding where to attend college, career planning, applying for financial aid or other aspects of the college planning process, there is help available.

Maine Educational Opportunity Center provides one-on-one and group support and guidance to adults with disabilities or low income, as well as adults who will be the first in their families to attend college. A MEOC Advisor may also be able to assist you with any problems you encounter with the Parents as Scholars program.

Please call MEOC at 1-800-281-3703 for further information.

What Kind of Help Will I Get From the PaS Program?

Monthly Cash Assistance

Monthly Cash Assistance

Students in the PaS Program will receive a monthly PaS check for the same amount that they would have received in the TANF program. For example, the maximum PaS check for a family of 3 is \$485 per month -- just as in TANF. Child support and other benefits are the same as for a family receiving TANF.

Support Services

The PaS Program provides the same support services that you would get in the ASPIRE Program. This includes most services necessary to complete your educational plan. You should make sure that the services you need are included in your amended "family contract" (more on this later). Here is a list of the support services currently available to PaS students. Some of the amounts available for these services may increase. Check with your ASPIRE/PaS case manager for more information.



Child care. Child Care for children under 13 years old. The Department will also pay for children 13 and over who are physically or mentally unable to care for themselves.

Transportation. Transportation is reimbursed at .30 cents a mile up to a maximum of 400 miles a week. Reimbursement is also available for public transportation and car-pooling. Taxi fare is available on a temporary basis when necessary.

Car repairs. The Department will pay up to a maximum of \$500 in a calendar year for needed car repairs. The vehicle must be registered to the PaS family. Except in emergencies, repair costs must be approved by your ASPIRE/PaS case manager before the work is done.



Auto liability insurance. PaS will pay the cost of the minimum liability insurance required by Maine law up to a maximum cost of \$300 for the time you are enrolled in PaS. If the vehicle is owned jointly with another person, or used by another person, PaS will only pay your share of the cost.



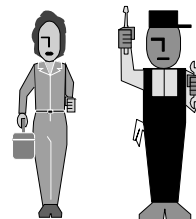
Eye care. PaS will pay the cost of eye care, not covered by Medicaid, that is necessary to participate in school. This includes glasses up to \$200 per calendar year. If the participant has a special vision problem, the Program may exceed this amount to cover the least expensive quality option necessary to correct the condition.

Dental care. PaS will pay the cost of dental care which is not covered by Medicaid, and which is necessary to alleviate pain or to help the participant become employed. It will pay the least expensive cost for quality care up to a maximum of \$2,000 for the time you are enrolled in PaS.



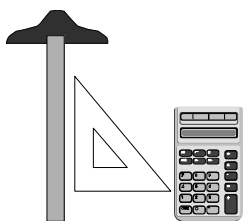
Books and Supplies. PaS will pay up to \$750 per academic year for books and supplies that are required for everyone in the class. PaS will only pay for books and supplies if you don't have enough left from your financial aid grant (not including loans) to cover these expenses.

Clothing and uniforms. PaS will pay for clothing and uniforms required by your program. It will also pay for emergency clothing to meet the participant's immediate needs such as a winter coat. Clothing and uniform costs are limited to \$300 in a calendar year.



Tuition and mandatory school fees. PaS will not usually pay tuition or mandatory fees. It will be up to the student to apply for financial aid for these items. Your college can give you information and assistance in seeking financial aid. However, PaS will pay tuition and fees when the participant is not able to get other educational funding because of poor credit or other reasons. In these limited cases, PaS will pay up to \$3,500 per academic year for tuition and fees.

Occupational Expenses. PaS will also pay up to \$500 during the time you are enrolled in PaS for occupational expenses such as tools, equipment, examination fees, or license fees if required by an employer or for approved self-employment.



Other services. PaS will pay up to \$500 in a calendar year for other expenses that are necessary for you to participate in your education plan. It will pay for the least expensive quality service required to meet the need. Some examples of "other" services may be a calculator, or special items like safety equipment for a science course.

Are There "Time Limits" in the PaS Program?

As of January, 2012, a family can get TANF and PaS for no more than 60 months unless they qualify for an “exemption” or an “extension.” This is a lifetime limit.

Extensions may be available when you have reached your 60-month time limit. An extension gives you additional months of TANF, but only under certain circumstances. In most cases you can get an extension for as long as you have a qualifying reason.

One of the reasons you might qualify for an extension is if you are participating in an Education or Training Program, such as PaS.

Who qualifies for an education or training extension?

You may qualify for an education/training extension if:

You apply in your 60th month of receiving TANF or PaS and you are in good standing and making good progress toward completing your education or training program that is approved by DHHS. This means you must:

- Maintain at least a 2.0 GPA (grade point average);
- Participate for the required number of hours and verify your participation; and
- Provide your ASPIRE worker with your financial aid award letters and grades as they become available.

Once you qualify you will be given an extension of up to 6 months. After that you may get unlimited, additional extensions as long as you show that you continue to qualify for an extension.

Please note: The following education and training programs will not qualify for an extension:

(1) Adult Basic Education; (2) GED activities; (3) English as a Second Language (ESL); or (4) High School.

For more information about who qualifies for exemptions or extensions, please ask for MEJP's client education piece entitled, New TANF Time Limit Rules, or call us at 626-7058, x 205.

Who is Eligible for Parents as Scholars?

PaS is limited to 2,000 participants at any one time. At the time of this printing there were less than 1000 parents enrolled in PaS, so there is still plenty of room in the program.

You are eligible for the PaS program if all of the following are true:

1. You are eligible for TANF;
2. You are "matriculating " (enrolled) in a two or four-year post-secondary degree program;
3. You do not already have a bachelor's degree in a field where there is work available to you;
4. You do not have the skills to earn at least 85% of Maine's median wage (\$51,717 for a family of three);
5. The degree you will be receiving will improve your ability to support your family; and
6. You have the aptitude to complete the educational program that you have chosen.

Being Accepted into PaS: How to Show that You are Eligible.

The key to getting into PaS is to be prepared to show that you meet the six eligibility criteria listed on page 6. Here are some suggestions that may help.

Are you "matriculating?" The law says a person must be "matriculating," or enrolled in a two or four-year post-secondary program to be eligible for PaS. Department of Health and Human Services' rules define "matriculation" as being enrolled in a two or four-year post-secondary program. Basically, if your school considers you to be matriculating, the Department will too, even if you are enrolled on a conditional basis or have not yet declared a major.

"Conditional Acceptance" Often students take some remedial classes at their college or university before they begin their actual college class work. If this is your situation, see if your school will grant you "conditional acceptance." This means that you are accepted on the condition that you complete your remedial work successfully. If you have been conditionally accepted, and are taking remedial courses at the school, you will be considered matriculating.

"Remedial Courses" If you are taking these remedial courses outside of a college or university, e.g. from a local adult education program, you will probably not be considered to be matriculating. However, you can apply for the PaS Program after you have finished these remedial courses and have been accepted and enrolled in a college program.

Can you earn 85% of the State median wage? Most people without a college degree do not have jobs where they can earn this salary, so this should not be a significant barrier for most PaS applicants. Look at the wages you received in the best paying job you have had. If that job paid less than 85% of the median income for your family size, as shown on the chart below, then this should not be a problem for you.

Family Size	2	3	4
85% of state median <u>weekly</u> income	\$856	\$995	\$1,223

<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/statemedian/>

However, if you have significant skills, and the Department argues that you are able to earn this much, you must be able to show why this is not true.

For example, you might show that:

1. The jobs in your previous occupation are no longer available in your area;
2. An injury prevents you from returning to the kind of work that paid that wage;
3. Your previous occupation does not actually pay at that level; or
4. There is some other reason you cannot earn 85% of the median wage.

There are many ways to bolster your case.

- Check your last wage level.
- Call people you know who work in that occupation now to find out what someone with your skill level could earn.
- Contact your union, if any, to find the rate of unemployment among union members with that skill.

- The Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) puts out publications listing wages for certain occupations in Maine. These publications are often available at local libraries, or directly from the Labor Market Information Division of the MDOL in Augusta at 287-2271. (The MDOL charges for their publications so you may want to check the library first.) You may also find this information on the web at: www.state.me.us/labor/lmis/
- If you are no longer medically able to do your old job, ask your doctor to write a letter saying so.

Will the educational program that you have chosen improve your ability to support your family?

Before you choose an educational program, it is important to have an idea of the *kinds of jobs* you will be suited for when you graduate, and the *wages* that you will be likely to earn.

You should also try to get information from your college or university about the *job placement rate* of people graduating from the program that you have chosen. If this information shows that the program that you have chosen is likely to improve your ability to support your family, then you will be prepared for any questions that your ASPIRE/PaS case manager may have about your educational choice.

If this information is not available at the college or university, check publications from the MDOL for information on the average and entry level wages in Maine. MDOL also produces information on the demand for certain occupations over the next several years. Check your local library for this information or contact the Labor Market Information Division of the MDOL at 287-2271. If your case manager denies a program that you have chosen, and you believe the program would improve your ability to support your family, you can request a fair hearing. (See page 20 for information on requesting a fair hearing.)

Do you have the aptitude to complete the educational program that you have chosen?

For many parents, it is tough to go back to school. If you are not sure whether you will be able to handle the program, talk to an academic counselor at the school. The ASPIRE/PaS case manager should accept the school's decision about whether or not you have the aptitude to succeed in the program that you have chosen. The best way to show ASPIRE that you have the aptitude to succeed is to be accepted by a college or university. This usually means the school has made a decision that you have the aptitude to succeed in their program. However, if your school admits everyone (*i.e. has an open admissions policy*) and your ASPIRE/PaS case manager questions your aptitude to succeed, you should get a letter from an academic counselor stating that they believe you have the aptitude to succeed in your chosen program.

If you are denied entrance into PaS because your case manager says you do not have the aptitude to succeed, contact Maine Equal Justice at 626-7058 or info@mejp.org.

Once I'm in PaS, What are the Rules?

To keep the cash assistance and support services that PaS provides for students, you must comply with your family contract and the following rules. *Remember, you can appeal your family contract if you disagree with what it requires you to do.*

How many hours a week must I "participate"? What counts as "participation"?

Important Information: Students must be involved in approved activities for a certain number of hours each week in order to receive assistance from the PaS Program. Students are required to verify their hours of participation. Here are the current requirements:

The first two years. Unless you have good cause (*see page 14*), you will be required to participate 20 hours per week in your first 2 years in the PaS Program. If you are attending school full-time, you will meet this requirement because both your class time and study time will count. *DHHS counts as participation 1 hour of study time for each hour of class time.*

For example, if you are taking 16 hours of classes (be sure to count all of the hours you actually spend in labs not just the credit hours you get), DHHS will assume that you are studying for 16 hours. This means that you will be "participating" for a total of 32 hours in that week. You will more than meet the participation requirement with your class time and study time alone.

The third year and beyond. After your first two years in the PaS Program, you will be required to increase your hours of participation. To meet this additional requirement *you can choose one of the following two options:*

Option #1. You can participate in 15 hours of "work-site" experience in addition to other education, training or study; or

Option #2. You can participate in a total of 40 hours of education, training, study, or work-site experience.

In general, people will find it most manageable to choose *option #2*. If you are in class at least 16 hours, you will be presumed to be studying at least 16 hours per week, leaving your additional work requirement at 8 hours a week.

However, if you are in a program that includes a significant internship, practicum or the like, you may want to choose *option #1*. Your internship can count toward your work requirement as well as earning you school credit.

Here are examples of how this choice might work for two different students:

Example - Option 1. Susan is an education major in her fourth year at the University. She is participating in class for 9 hours a week and in an internship for 15 hours a week at the local school. Susan has chosen *option #1*. Her internship surpasses the 15-hour per week work requirement.

Example - Option 2: Judy is an engineering major in her third year at the University. This semester her coursework does not include any practicums, field placements, internships or labs. With her 16 hours of classes and 16 hours of study time she is already participating 32 hours a week. By taking 8 hours of work-study she is able to reach the 40 hours of activity required by *option #2*. She chooses *option #2*.

This may sound difficult, but don't panic! We know that it is tough to work while you are going to school and raising a family. It might help that "**work-site experience**" is very broadly defined in Maine law.

"Work-site experience" includes:

Paid employment	Work study	Practicums
Clinical placement	Internships	Volunteer work

Laboratory or field work related to your employment goal.

Any other work-like activity that will increase your chances of getting employed.

In a student's last semester, time spent in resume preparation, employment research, interviews or other activities related to getting a job also count as work-site experience.

NOTE: Work-study income does not effect the monthly Parents as Scholars check or your food stamp benefit.

What about summers?

If you are not in school in the summer or during other times when your school is not in session, you will be expected to do something such as volunteer or work for pay, 30 hours per week. You may also have the option of continuing to take classes throughout the summer. If you choose to do this, the participation requirements for students described above will apply to you during this time too. Summer requirements could be different for parents who are under an education extension after having reached their 60th month of TANF. Please call us if you are having problems with this issue.

Do I have to go to school full-time?

Department rules say that a PaS student must be enrolled in school full-time with the expectation that they will finish their degree in the "normal" time for that program (either 2 years or 4 years). **However, the rules allow students more time to finish if they have "good cause"** (see "What is Good Cause?" on page 14).

Good cause can help people in two ways.

1. Good cause can help a person who needs more time to finish their program. A person with good cause may be given up to 1 ½ times the normal amount of time to complete their program. This would allow a student to take fewer credit hours in a semester. A student with good cause can take:
 - Up to 6 years to complete a 4-year program; and
 - Up to 3 years to complete a 2-year program.

Students who need even more time than this to complete school because of a disability must be given that time. It is a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Call Maine Equal Justice at 626-7058, if you think that you need more time as a reasonable accommodation but your case manager disagrees.

2. The number of hours a student is required to participate *each week* can also be reduced if the student has "good cause." As we discussed above, students who have been in PaS for more than 2 years are required to participate in additional hours of "work-site experience." These additional hours may also be reduced for good cause.

For example, Michelle is in her third year at the University. She is a full-time student and is also required to participate in work-site experience in addition to school and study. However, her daughter has been diagnosed with a condition that requires therapy several times a week. This prevents Michelle from participating in these additional hours of work-site experience. In this case, Michelle should be excused from participating in these additional hours for good cause.

What is Good Cause?

"Good Cause" includes:

- The need to care for a family member with special needs;
- A physical or mental health problem;
- Illness, accident or death;
- A serious family problem;
- The need to appear in court;
- The lack of a support service like child care or transportation needed to participate;
- Inability to participate because of domestic violence, including the physical or psychological effects of abuse, the need to participate in legal proceedings or counseling, or to protect yourself from the abuser; or
- Any other reason that is beyond your control or that a reasonable person would consider to be good cause.

If you believe that you have good cause, but your ASPIRE/PaS case manager disagrees, you can request a fair hearing. (See page 20.)

"Satisfactory Progress"

To remain in PaS, you must make "satisfactory progress" in your program.

Keeping your grades up. To maintain satisfactory progress, you will have to meet the standards of the school that you attend, or at least maintain a 2.0 grade point average (GPA). If you fall below a GPA of 2.0 in one semester, PaS will give you one "probationary" semester to get your grades up. If your overall GPA drops below 2.0, your case manager should give you one semester to bring your semester GPA up to 2.0 and a second semester to bring your overall GPA up to 2.0.

Other Expectations.

You will also be expected to:

1. Attend classes as scheduled and participate as required by the school, Many PaS participants are now required to verify the time they spend in class. This is usually done by having your professor sign a paper given to you by DHHS. If you have problems with verifying your class time, and have been unable to resolve the problem with your DHHS worker, please feel free to call Maine Equal Justice for advice.
2. Report to your case manager anything that might affect your ability to participate in your program,
3. Give your ASPIRE/PaS case manager a copy of your financial aid award letters, and
4. Give your ASPIRE/PaS case manager copies of your grades, as they become available.

If you do not meet these requirements, then your case manager may insist that you return to TANF and the ordinary ASPIRE program. This decision must be made in writing and you must be given the opportunity to appeal it. (See page 20 for information on requesting a fair hearing.)

What if I Can't Meet a PaS Requirement?

In order to maintain your eligibility for PaS you must maintain your eligibility for TANF. If you don't meet a PaS requirement such as attending a meeting with your case manager, your case manager can propose a sanction just like in ASPIRE. If you have good cause (*see page 14 for a list of good cause reasons*) for not meeting a requirement, you should not be sanctioned. There are several steps the case manager must take before a sanction is imposed:

1. Thoroughly review your circumstances;
2. Send you a notice explaining why you might be sanctioned along with a complete list of good cause reasons as stated in Maine law;
3. Give you an opportunity to tell DHHS what your good cause circumstances are; and
4. Get their supervisor to approve the recommendation to sanction you.

Under new rules that took effect in 2012, a sanction can mean that not only will you lose all the support services you get to help you go to school, but your entire family can lose their TANF benefit. Please see our booklet: *Understanding TANF & ASPIRE* for more information about Full Family Sanctions.

If you disagree with a sanction, you should appeal it (*see page 20*).

Special Issues for Two-Parent Families

Families with both parents in the household can be eligible for TANF or PaS if:

1. One parent is disabled or incapacitated; or
2. The Principal Wage Earner -- the parent who earned the most money in the 24 months prior to application -- is unemployed. To qualify, the principal wage earner must have earned a certain amount of money in the past, or have been eligible for or received unemployment benefits in the last year.

Parents in 2-parent families can apply for the PaS Program.

Both parents can participate in PaS. However, if only one parent is in PaS, *the parent who is not in school will be expected to work for at least 30 hours per week in either a paid job or in a "volunteer" placement. The parent who is in school must meet all PaS requirements.*

Be aware that if the principal wage earner (as defined above) works at a paid job for more than 130 hours in a month, that has the "catch-22" effect of making the entire family ineligible for either PaS or TANF!

Instead of working 30 hours per week, the parent who is not in school also has the option of participating in up to a year of vocational educational training, or applying for PaS.

Finally, no one can be required to work, unpaid, for more hours than would result if you considered your "pay" to be minimum wage (\$7.50 per hour as of October 1, 2009), and your "pay check" to be your PaS check and food stamps combined.

How Do I Apply for PaS?

If you are not getting TANF benefits now.

1. **Apply for TANF.** If you are not receiving TANF right now, you must first apply for TANF benefits at your regional DHHS office or online at My Maine Connection. The same application is used for TANF and PaS benefits. *(Remember that you must be eligible for TANF in order to be eligible for PaS.)*
2. **Orientation meeting.** While your TANF eligibility is being determined, you will be required to attend a group orientation meeting. At this meeting you should be told about the PaS Program, as well as other options available in the ASPIRE Program.

3. **Meet with case manager.** Next you will meet with an ASPIRE/PaS case manager. Tell your case manager that you want to participate in the PaS Program. Ask for the PaS application form, fill it out and give it to the ASPIRE/PaS case manager, along with:
 - a. Your letter of acceptance from the college or university you'll be attending
 - b. Your financial aid award letter; (see Tuition and Mandatory Fees on page 4 of this booklet and talk to your case manager if you are unable to get financial aid) and
 - c. Your class schedule.
4. **Written decision.** You should get a written decision, within 30 days of your request, telling you whether or not you will be admitted into the PaS Program. You have a right to a fair hearing if you disagree with this decision. *(See page 20 for information on requesting a fair hearing.)*

If you are receiving TANF benefits now.

1. **Apply for PaS at any time.** You can apply for the PaS Program at any time. Ask your ASPIRE/PaS case manager for the PaS application. (If you don't have an ASPIRE/PaS case manager, ask your TANF worker for the application.) Complete the application and return it to your case manager, along with:
 - a. Your letter of acceptance from the college or university you'll be attending
 - b. Your financial aid award letter; (see Tuition and Mandatory Fees on page 4 of this booklet and talk to your case manager if you are unable to get financial aid) and
 - c. Your class schedule.
2. **Written decision.** You should get a written decision on this application within 30 days.

You have a right to a fair hearing if you disagree with DHHS's decision.
(See page 20 for information on requesting a fair hearing.)

How Will I Know if my Educational Program and Support Services Have Been Approved?

When you meet with your ASPIRE/PaS case manager you will complete an *amendment to your "Family Contract."* (You signed the original "family contract" when you applied for TANF. That is why this new contract is called an "amendment.")

During this meeting emphasize that you want to be admitted to the PaS Program and tell your case manager:

- What kind of educational program you want, and
- The support services you will need to participate in it.

You should be given a written list of all available support services. Check off all of those that you will need and give the list back to your ASPIRE/PaS case manager. *(See pages 2-4 of this pamphlet for a list of support services.)*

Next, **your case manager will fill out the contract** indicating the educational program approved for you, and the support services that the Department will provide to you.

If you disagree with anything in this contract you have the right to request a fair hearing. You can appeal any part of this contract. For example, you can appeal a decision denying your choice of education or training program, or DHHS's refusal to provide a support service, like eye glasses, that you think you need for your program.

Important note: DHHS will require you to sign the Family Contract amendment even if you disagree with it. Don't worry. Signing it does not prevent you from appealing through a fair hearing. *(See page 20 for information on a fair hearing.)* The forms sometimes have a place that you can check saying you disagree. If the box is not there, just write in "I disagree with parts of this contract." and tell your ASPIRE/PaS case manager that you would like a conciliation meeting or Fair Hearing. *(See page 20).* Even if you don't check that box or write in that you disagree, you can still appeal.

Fair Hearings

Throughout this pamphlet, we have told you of your right to appeal by requesting a fair hearing if you disagree with a DHHS decision.

Anyone who disagrees with any action or decision regarding their PaS or TANF cash benefit or their PaS or ASPIRE program or support services has a right to appeal.

To appeal, tell the case manager who made the decision that you want a fair hearing. A fair hearing is then held before an impartial hearing officer who will hear your testimony and the DHHS case manager or supervisor (and any other witnesses that you or DHHS want), look at the records and the law and make a written decision.

Instead of asking for a fair hearing or before asking for a fair hearing, you can ask for a **conciliation meeting**. This is a meeting held with you, your ASPIRE/PaS case manager and their supervisor to try and work out the disagreement. If you are still not satisfied after this meeting you can ask for a fair hearing.

Anyone requesting a fair hearing should seek legal advice and assistance from Pine Tree Legal Assistance. Contact the office nearest to you listed on page 21.

Hearings usually must be requested within 30 days of the decision.

If the decision was to terminate or reduce benefits, then a hearing requested within 10 days will allow you to continue to receive benefits at the prior level pending the outcome of the fair hearing.

If the hearing officer decides the termination or reduction in cash benefits was correct, the benefits the person received during the appeal period must be paid back (usually by a 10% or 30% reduction in future benefit checks.)

Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc.
www.ptla.org

*Anyone requesting a fair hearing
should seek legal advice from Pine Tree Legal Assistance.*

39 Green Street P.O. Box 2429 Augusta, ME 04338 Phone: 622-4731	115 Main Street, 2nd Fl. Bangor, ME 04401 Phone: 942-8241	88 Federal Street P.O. Box 547 Portland, ME 04112 Phone: 774-8211
37 Park St., Ste. 401 Lewiston, ME 04240 Phone: 784-1558	13 Cooper Street PO Box 278 Machias, ME 04654 Phone: 255-8656	373 Main Street Presque Isle, ME 04769 Phone: 764-4349

Who is Maine Equal Justice Partners?

www.mejp.org

Maine Equal Justice Partners (MEJP) is a non-profit legal aid and advocacy organization dedicated to finding solutions to poverty and improving the lives of people with low income in Maine. We represent low income individuals in the courts, in front of administrative agencies and at the State House. We focus on the issues that affect people's lives – access to adequate health care, food and income security, supports for working families, and higher education and training opportunities.

We would be glad to answer any questions that you have about the information in this pamphlet. For additional information about the Parents as Scholars Program and other safety net programs visit our website: www.mejp.org.

Written and Published by:



Contact us:

Maine Equal Justice Partners

126 Sewall Street, Augusta, Maine 04330

Phone: (207) 626-7058

Toll-free: 1-866-626-7059

Fax: (207) 621-8148

E-mail: info@mejp.org

www.mejp.org

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