



# Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

In support of LDs 1774 and 1772

An Act To Reduce Child Poverty by Leveraging Investments so Families Can Thrive (LIFT)  
and

An Act to Secure Transitions to Economic Prosperity for Maine Families and Children (STEP)  
May 28, 2019

Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Whitney Parrish, Director of Policy and Program for the Maine Women's Lobby. The Maine Women's Lobby is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, statewide membership organization devoted to raising the economic, social, and political status of Maine's 678,000 women and girls. We are also a proud member of the Invest in Tomorrow initiative steering committee.

I am writing in strong support of LD 1774, *An Act to Reduce Child Poverty by Leveraging Investments so Families can Thrive* and LD 1772, *An Act to Secure Transitions to Economic Prosperity for Maine Families and Children*.

Women disproportionately live in poverty in Maine. There are a number of reasons for women's relative poverty. Women are likely to be paid less than their male counterparts, and women are more likely to work in inflexible, low-wage jobs without benefits. One of the lesser discussed side effects of domestic or sexual violence is poverty that lasts long after the violence has ended. We are also more likely to be single or custodial parents, as well as the primary caretaker for aging parents or disabled family members. As you have heard, nearly one in eight Maine children grow up in poverty for these exact reasons. Due to structural inequities and discrimination, children of color in Maine face poverty rates three to four times higher than white children.

Economic security is a leading factor in the long-term well-being of Maine's women, girls, and families. We must ensure that our public safety net programs—such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Parents as Scholars (PaS), and Medicaid—are adequately and sustainably structured and funded to meet the needs of the economically insecure. As underscored by the Invest in Tomorrow 2018 report, children and families must be able to meet their basic needs to thrive and to find steady, gainful, and sustainable employment. We applaud the bipartisan efforts of LIFT and STEP to work to ease the “benefits cliff,” as we hear time and again that women will often forego a new job with better wages or more hours or even decline a raise because of the abrupt end to public assistance that could result. We

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also believe that adjustments made to the eligibility requirements in TANF through LIFT are a critical step toward ensuring that more very low-income children and families can access their basic needs and receive the supports necessary to attain and maintain economic security.

We all have a stake in ending child poverty in Maine, not only for the children themselves, but also for their families, our communities, and our state economy overall. LIFT and STEP take the bold steps necessary to begin taking on this critically important task. We strongly urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LDs 1774 and 1772. Thank you for your time.

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