

## State Biennial Budget 2018-2019

### Talking Points

- The Governor's proposed budget cuts more than \$65 Million dollars from anti-poverty programs that provide health care, food and shelter to Maine people struggling to make ends meet.
- These cuts come on the heels of deep cuts made in recent years that have already caused more than 40,000 Mainers to lose health care; 16,000 children to lose support meeting basic needs; and more than 40,000 to lose food assistance (SNAP).
- The governor's budget takes from kids, the poor, and working Mainers to give huge tax breaks to the rich.
- Over the last five years:
  - Maine children have fallen into deep poverty (\$10,000/year or less for a family of 3) at a rate 8 times greater than the rest of the nation.
  - Maine has the third highest rate of hunger in the nation and even as hunger is diminishing in the rest of the country it is increasing here.
  - Maine's overall health and child well-being rankings compared to other states have also plummeted during this period.
- None of these harmful policy changes are necessary. We do **NOT** have a budget shortfall. We do not have to make unnecessary and difficult choices between serving one group of vulnerable people at the expense of another.
- A state's budget is one of the most important tools available to solve the most pressing problems that it faces. This budget does not solve Maine's problems. It makes them worse.
- We need a budget that truly solves the state's problems; that makes the promise of reform *real* by investing in Maine people and providing the opportunities that they need to leave poverty behind.
  - Mainers want more access to healthcare, **NOT** less.
  - Mainers want to expand opportunities for kids, **NOT** push them deeper into poverty or undercut their education.
  - We need a plan that takes on the challenges facing Maine families, **NOT** a plan that makes these problems worse.

## Talking Points by Topic Area

### **Sweeping Cuts to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):**

- The TANF program has been cut dramatically in the last five years—only one-third as many children living in poverty today get help from the TANF program as did in 2011.
- The proposals in the biennial budget would make Maine an extreme outlier compared to most other states, with harsh time limits, sanction policies, and other penalties in effect in only a distinct minority of other states.
- This budget would make the opportunity for a college education through the Parents as Scholars program inaccessible to most.
- We all agree—people living in poverty most of all—that our welfare system needs to reform to do a better job creating opportunities and helping families move out of poverty. Real reform means making policy that improves the lives of families and children, not driving them deeper into poverty.

### **Further Reductions in MaineCare Coverage:**

- The proposed budget would eliminate MaineCare coverage for nearly 20,000 parents, most of whom work, and for 5,800 young adults all of whom are with low income.
- The proposed budget eliminates MaineCare eligibility for these parents with income from 40% to 100% of the federal poverty level effective July 1, 2018. For a parent and one child, eligibility would be reduced from a gross income of about \$1,402 per month to \$561 per month.
- Because their income is so low and because the Governor has rejected accepting federal funds that would cover the cost of providing health coverage to people with low income, parents and young adults who would lose coverage under the budget proposal would fall into the “coverage gap.” This means parents and young adults who would lose coverage under the Governor’s proposed budget cuts would not have access to affordable health coverage under the Affordable Care Act.
- These proposals come on top of budget cuts in recent years that have resulted in the loss of health care coverage for 40,000 Mainers.
- Mainers want more access to healthcare, **NOT** less. Instead of further reducing access to affordable health care we should be expanding access here in Maine. Reject these proposals that will only make the lack of affordable health care problem worse.

### **Total Elimination of General Assistance:**

- General Assistance is Maine's safety net of last resort. It protects thousands of Mainers by keeping a roof over their heads and food on the table when they have nowhere else to turn.
- Over 10,000 Mainers from throughout the State receive GA annually.
- GA already requires that people exhaust every other resource before they can get help. If these people in crisis have already exhausted all other resources, where would they have left to turn to avoid homelessness and hunger?

### **Further Cuts to Maine's Food Supplement (SNAP) Program:**

- Despite strong evidence that cutting SNAP benefits is making more Mainers hungrier, the Governor wants to further punish the poor with extreme measure such as prohibiting the state from *ever* exempting people from the Food Stamp (SNAP) 3-month time limit even if they live somewhere where it is tough to get a job, or don't have any transportation to work.
- These cuts would prevent any person convicted of a felony drug offense from receiving Food Supplement benefit for the rest of their lives even though they served their time.
  - Successful community reentry for former prisoners requires stability and access to basic needs like food.
  - Most people returning home from prison had been struggling in some significant way prior to their involvement with the criminal justice system including substance abuse, mental health issues, homelessness, or physical or sexual abuse. Without proper support, these individuals may continue to struggle with similar issues upon their release from prison.

### **Further Restricting Immigrants' Access to Anti-Poverty Programs:**

- The Governor's budget would bar many Maine immigrants from critical supports and services (SNAP, TANF, SSI & GA).
- Today, given the current climate, it is imperative that we act to preserve access to these critical supports for asylum seekers and other immigrants who rely on them. As Mainers we stand up for fair policies that don't leave anyone behind or shut anyone out.
- Immigrants are enriching our state and our nation. To ensure Maine's vitality, we must create and sustain a welcoming community that embraces diversity and shows humanity and respect for those who seek a new life here.
- Providing assistance for asylum seekers and other immigrants is a relatively small investment today that will pay off dividends into our future. Assistance through anti-poverty programs increases the likelihood of a successful transition here while people get their feet on the ground and wait for permission to work from the federal government.
- Let's invest in Maine's future by supporting policies that welcome immigrants and build an economy that works for all of us.