



Testimony of Dr. Victoria W. Rogers In Support of LD 78

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee – I am Dr. Victoria Rogers, a resident of Saco, and I am here to offer testimony in support of LD 78, An Act to Protect Children from Extreme Poverty by Preserving Children’s Access to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits.

I am a pediatrician at The Barbara Bush Children’s Hospital at Maine Medical Center and the Senior Director of Let’s Go! Let’s Go! is a statewide obesity prevention program focusing on healthy eating and active living. We currently work with over 1,800 sites throughout Maine – schools, early care and education programs, healthcare practices, out-of-school programs, and worksites to create places where children, youth, and adults have easy access to healthy food and physical activity –pillars which help children develop to the best of their abilities. And the good news is that recent data reveal that the Let’s Go! approach is working for children - children who go to Let’s Go! schools are more likely to eat more fruit and veggies, drink less sugary drinks and be more physically active.

As a pediatrician I know firsthand how important it is to ensure that children whose families suffer in poverty have access to TANF assistance. TANF is an important safety net for families and children in poverty by providing access to healthy food, which is critically important for optimal child development. Additionally, TANF provides assistance with job training, work opportunities, connection to other services, help with childcare, and some transportation expenses. All with the goal of assisting hard working Mainers to become self-sufficient.

For some adults receiving TANF assistance from time to time life gets hard for them and they find it difficult to comply with the TANF contract. This means not only do they lose their benefits, but the whole family loses TANF assistance. So, what does this look like for the children – their safety net is gone! Their access to childcare is in jeopardy. Their access to healthy food is in jeopardy. Is this fair? If TANF benefits are to help reduce children in poverty this appears to be doing just the opposite.

LD78 still acknowledges that the adult would have his/her benefits terminated if they do not comply with the contract however it upholds the intent of TANF – to help move children and families out of poverty. This safety net for children is so important to their development and their health and as we all know the health of our children helps ensure the health of all of our communities.

For these reasons, I whole heartedly support LD78.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to take any questions.

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