



Preble Street

Turning Hunger and Homelessness into Opportunity and Hope

March 3, 2022

Florence House

Huston Commons

Logan Place

Anti-Trafficking Services

Veterans Housing Services

Rapid Re-Housing

Emergency Food Programs

Teen Center

Joe Kreisler Teen Shelter

First Place

Street Outreach Collaborative

Advocacy

Maine Hunger Initiative

Health Services

MMC-Preble Street

Learning Collaborative

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Good morning, Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, and esteemed members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, Senator Carney, Representative Harnett, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Terence Miller, and I am the Advocacy Director at Preble Street, a nonprofit human service agency with over fifteen programs serving the most vulnerable people across the state of Maine. The mission of [Preble Street](#) is to provide accessible barrier-free services to empower people experiencing homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty and to advocate for solutions to these problems. I am writing on behalf of Preble Street to strongly support Part JJ of the Supplemental Budget (LD 1995) and requesting the Legislature go a step further in making an ongoing appropriation to fund civil legal aid in Maine.

Every day, Preble Street clients face challenges that require legal advice, representation, or advocacy, including domestic violence, elder abuse and exploitation, Veteran's benefits, eviction, employment issues, human trafficking, and barriers to healthcare. These legal issues often relate to an individual or family's ability to meet basic human needs, including shelter and food. The pandemic has only exacerbated this need. Despite the creativity of the judicial branch and the generosity of the private bar, a sustained and adequate public investment in civil legal aid is desperately needed. The present patchwork of civil legal aid will never meet the goal of providing legal help to everyone in Maine who needs it but cannot afford it.

The one-time funding for civil legal aid in the Governor's proposed supplemental budget is an excellent start in supporting critical civil legal aid infrastructure. However, what is ultimately needed is an ongoing general fund appropriation to increase capacity to meet the unmet legal needs of people who cannot afford legal assistance. Civil legal aid providers need to increase staffing to meet these needs on an ongoing basis, and it is not possible to staff up with one-time funding.

The national standard sets the goal of ten (10) legal aid attorneys for every 10,000 low-income people. Currently, Maine falls far short of this Justice Index goal with fewer than two (2) legal aid attorneys per 10,000 low-income people. We can and must do better than Maine's current level of civil legal aid to meet the challenges of today and help Maine's communities and economy recover from the pandemic and its fallout.

Preble Street strongly supports Part JJ of the Supplemental Budget (LD 1995) and requests the Legislature to support ongoing funding to increase civil legal services capacity to meet the unmet legal needs of people who cannot afford legal assistance.