



# MAINE EQUAL JUSTICE

*Finding solutions to poverty and improving the lives of people with low income in Maine.*

## MOVING MAINE FORWARD

- Maine's economy has changed and hard-working Maine families are falling through the cracks.
- In these tough times our safety net programs are more important than ever.
- Times have changed and public programs must change too.
- We must reevaluate and restructure programs to respond to the challenges of today's economy.
- Maine people want common sense solutions that work for our people, our communities and our economy.

**Maine's economy has changed and hard-working Maine families are falling through the cracks.** Unemployment rates are high; jobs are scarce; and many people are having a hard time simply finding and holding onto a job. We're not short on work ethic here in Maine; we're short on jobs and opportunity.

**These tough times are driving more Mainers into poverty.** Many are struggling to meet their most basic needs.

- One in *nine* Maine people live below the federal poverty level, which amounts to an annual income of \$18,310 for a family of three.<sup>1</sup>
- One in every *six* Maine children lives in poverty.<sup>2</sup>

**Today in Maine many families struggle just to put food on the table.**

- Maine has the third highest rate of "very low food security" in the nation.<sup>3</sup>
- One in *five* Maine children goes without food because his or her family cannot afford it.<sup>4</sup>

### **Rising housing costs make it even harder to get by in today's world.**

- Over 42,000 low-income households that rent pay more than half of their income towards housing costs.<sup>5</sup>
- Many Maine families are at risk of losing their home. In the first 8 months of 2010, there were 2,710 new foreclosure filings on Maine homes, with 271 new filings in August alone.<sup>6</sup>

### **Low wage workers are more than twice as likely to be out of work, but only half as likely to get unemployment benefits when they need them.<sup>7</sup>**

- Maine's Unemployment Insurance Program (UI) provides help to only 3 in 10 Maine workers who are unemployed.
- Over the last 40 years the percentage of jobless workers receiving unemployment benefits in Maine has decreased significantly-particularly when compared to other states.

### **Many Maine workers are being left behind as new jobs increasingly demand education and skills that they don't currently have.**

- 87% of new jobs created in Maine over the next ten years will require post-secondary education; only 13% will be available to those with a high school diploma or less.<sup>9</sup>
- Only 39% of Maine workers have an associate's degree or higher.<sup>10</sup>

### **In these tough times our safety net programs are more important than ever.**

They help put food on the table for hungry children and keep families warm during Maine winters. They provide working families with critical services like health care for their children and medications for their parents and grandparents. They also provide supports such as affordable child care and education and training services so that parents can sustain gainful employment.

### **Over the years these programs have helped lift thousands of Maine families out of poverty.**

In the 1960s, Maine's poverty rate was one and a half times higher than the rest of New England and was nearly even with the U.S. poverty rate. Today, we are much closer to the New England average and lower than the U.S. average.<sup>11</sup> Maine's progress is in part due to programs that help families get back on their feet and gain the skills they need to leave poverty behind.

### **Times have changed and public programs must change too. We must reevaluate and restructure them to respond to the challenges of today's economy.**

These programs are complex and we need to be thoughtful about the steps we take to improve them, remembering how important they are to hard-working Maine families. We need to pay attention to what works and what doesn't. We have a responsibility to be guided by facts, not anecdotes or fiction.

## Maine people want common sense solutions that work for our people, our communities and our economy.

We all agree that safety net programs can work better for Maine's working families. We must:

- Get rid of rigid rules, like ones that pull the rug out from under people just when they start to get their feet on the ground;
- Redesign programs to make sure that people aren't penalized for work;
- Ensure that families moving into the workforce receive the help and services they need to get and keep a job that pays the bills;
- Help today's workers upgrade their skills and education so they can compete for new jobs with higher wages and more stable employment prospects;
- Not leave anyone behind; programs must offer people with disabilities access to the services they need to become employed, and the support they need to stay in the workforce.

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### (Endnotes)

1 [http://cbpp-fbi.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/ACS-Tables\\_filled-in.xls](http://cbpp-fbi.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/ACS-Tables_filled-in.xls).

2 <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Rankings.aspx?ind=43>

3 <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR83/ERR83.pdf>

4 John Cook, Ph.D., Boston Medical Center researcher, "Child Food Insecurity in the United States: 2006-2008," Feeding America; 2010, <http://feedingamerica.org/our-network/the-studies/~-/media/Files/research/state-child-hunger-2010.ashx?.pdf>.

5 MIT Center for Real Estate, Housing Affordability Initiative (HAI) (2009).

6 <http://www.realtytrac.com/states/maine.html>

7 <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d071147.pdf>

8 Wayne Vroman, Analysis of Unemployment Insurance Reciprocity in Maine: Interim Report, The Urban Institute (August 2010).

9 <http://cew.georgetown.edu/jobs2018/>

10 [http://www.collegeforme.com/pdf/HigherEdIndicators\\_aug09.pdf](http://www.collegeforme.com/pdf/HigherEdIndicators_aug09.pdf)

11 <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/census/1960/cphl162.html>