Legislature Passes State Budget: *Maine People Made a Difference*

In January the Governor proposed a state budget for the next two years that included yet another round of significant cuts to programs that serve people with low income. Fortunately, the news at the end of the 2013 legislative session was better than it has been for the past few years. Most of the proposed cuts to MaineCare, General Assistance and income support for older immigrants and immigrants with disabilities were defeated. For the first time in several years there was even a bit of good news for families with low income, as some families receiving TANF will see a $100 increase in their “housing special need payment”.

Not all programs fared as well, however. Maine’s ‘circuit breaker’ (property tax relief) program was replaced with a new ‘Property Tax Fairness Program’. Benefits and eligibility levels have been reduced dramatically for Mainers who need help with paying their property taxes. The Competitive Skills Scholarship Program, which gives people with low income a chance to go to college or earn a certificate or degree was also cut back. Fewer people will now be able to participate in the program.

(Continued on Page 2, Budget)

MEJP Welcomes New Staff Member!

Maine Equal Justice is pleased to welcome Ann Woloson on staff. As MEJP’s new policy analyst, Ann brings her extensive knowledge of health care and other public policy issues to our team.

(Continued on Page 15, Ann)
The session began with a powerful public hearing on the Governor’s proposed budget. Dozens of seniors, people with disabilities, families struggling to make ends meet, new Mainers and their allies came to the State House and made a strong case to reject the proposed cuts. For days after the public hearing legislators commented on the power of their testimony.

The legislature’s Appropriations Committee worked night and day to find common ground. They created a unanimous budget that was enacted by 2/3rds of the full Legislature. Nonetheless, Governor LePage vetoed that budget. Thankfully legislators in both the House and the Senate came together to “override” his veto. This means that the budget bill has become law over the Governor’s objection. This prevented the state shutdown that would have occurred if there was no budget on July 1. It also preserved the hard work that was done to prevent some of the most harmful cuts.

And at the end of the day, the voices of Maine people were heard. MEJP recognizes the many individuals who helped prevent some of the most perilous cuts, with their participation in the hearings, testimony and calls to their legislators. Thank you!

The following articles give more information about some parts of the final budget that affect people with low income.

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**Saving Maine’s Low Cost Drug Program for the Elderly and Disabled**

Maine’s Low Cost Drug Program for the Elderly and Disabled (DEL) has helped Maine seniors and people with disabilities pay for their prescription drug costs for nearly 40 years. This year it was on the ‘chopping block’ because the Governor proposed to eliminate the program. Thanks to the many voices who spoke up in opposition to this cut, the program was saved.

Eligibility for the program will stay at 175% of the poverty level. This means a person with annual income of about $20,107, or a couple with income of about $27,142, may get help paying for their prescription drugs. (If more than 40% of your income is used to pay for prescription drugs, your income can be 25% higher than the level listed here.)

Basic DEL benefits cover about 80% of the cost of most generic drugs. Generic drugs are covered for all conditions.

The program also covers about 80% of the cost of certain brand-name drugs for the treatment of certain health conditions. **Brand name** drugs can be used to treat: Diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, chronic lung disease (including asthma), arthritis, osteoporosis, anticoagulation, incontinence, thyroid disease, Parkinson’s disease, glaucoma multiple sclerosis, and ALS.

Visit [http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/oads/aging/resource/lc_drugs.htm](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/oads/aging/resource/lc_drugs.htm) to learn more about DEL. You can request an application or get more information by calling toll-free: 1-866-796-2463.
The Legislature Rejected Deep Cuts to the General Assistance Program

The Governor’s budget proposed major cuts to the General Assistance (GA) Program. Thankfully, the Legislature rejected most of them. Instead, they adopted many of the recommendations of the General Assistance Working Group. This working group was convened by the Legislature in 2012 to improve the GA program and identify savings in the program.

Here is a summary of what happened in the Legislature this session related to GA.

Proposals in the Governor’s Budget

1. REJECTED: The Governor proposed to eliminate GA eligibility for families with children who have reached the TANF 60-month time limit. These families face multiple barriers to work and experience severe hardships as a result of losing their TANF assistance. This proposal would have left many children and their families without a safety net. The Legislature rejected this proposal.

2. REJECTED: The Governor proposed to cap the State’s share of GA costs at 50%. The larger service centers, like Portland, Lewiston and Bangor provide the largest amount of GA. These cities currently receive 90% reimbursement from the State once the cities have spent a certain amount on GA. If this proposal were enacted, these cities would only receive 50% reimbursement from the State likely resulting in longer waits or reduced access to GA in those cities. The Legislature rejected this proposal.

3. REJECTED: The Governor’s budget proposed to limit GA for housing costs to 9 months in a year. This proposal would have made the temporary 9-month limit, which was enacted as part of last year’s budget, permanent. The Legislature rejected the Governor’s proposal to make the limit permanent. This means the temporary housing limit expired at the end of June 2013 and is no longer in effect.

One of the Governor’s proposals was adopted but was modified:

4. ADOPTED (with modification): The Governor proposed to make permanent, a temporary 10% reduction in the overall maximum benefit amount that an individual can receive. There will be a 10% reduction in benefits but it will be calculated using the more recent fair market rental amounts so the benefit will increase modestly each year.

Many GA Work Group recommendations were adopted in the budget. Some of those changes include:

(Continued on Page 4, GA)
1. **Improved hardship extensions for TANF and FS for legal non-citizens:** Asylum seekers will be able to continue getting Food Supplement benefits and TANF after they receive their work permit until they are able to find work. This extension has a funding cap, so the allotted funds may run out during the next two years. Benefits under this hardship would no longer be available then.

2. **Unemployment benefits count as income in GA if lost due to fraud:** Unemployment insurance (UI) income will now be considered as available to a client in calculating GA benefits when the client has lost unemployment benefits due to fraud, as defined by the UI program.

3. **Circuit Breaker benefit counted as income in GA:** Under existing law, municipal GA administrators are prohibited from counting the Circuit Breaker benefit as available income in the determination of eligibility and benefits. The circuit breaker benefit (now the Property Tax Fairness Credit) will now count as income in the GA program. However, this income will not count if it is used to pay for basic necessities.

4. **New way to calculate benefits when a household member is sanctioned:** Currently, the pro-rata share of assistance provided to a household when some, but not all members are sanctioned for a GA program violation is calculated differently across the state. The pro-rata share will now be calculated by dividing the maximum level of assistance available to the entire household by the total number of household members.

5. **New way to calculate benefits when someone gets a lump sum payment:** The pro-rata calculation for lump sum payments (e.g., inheritances, SSI retroactive payments, court settlements) has been calculated by using the greater of the entire household’s verified actual monthly expenses or 150% of the applicable Federal Poverty Level guidelines. Under the new law the pro-rata calculation for lump sum payments can only be based on actual monthly expenses.

**Other recommendations from the GA Working Group were also adopted in the budget.** For a complete list of changes and more details please visit ([http://www.mejp.org/sites/default/files/Changes-to-GA-2014-2015-Biennial-Budget.pdf](http://www.mejp.org/sites/default/files/Changes-to-GA-2014-2015-Biennial-Budget.pdf)).
Some help for families on TANF: A bright spot in the state budget

Some families who get TANF may see a $100 increase in their monthly benefit. This $100 is for families that spend 75% or more of their income on housing. The $100 increase will start October 1, 2013.

The state budget included this increase to the Housing Special Needs (HSN) payment for certain TANF families. The HSN allowance has been giving $100 extra each month for families who use 75% or more of their income to pay for housing. The state budget doubled this amount from $100 to $200.

This increase in the HSN payment will help more than 3,000 families with children who struggle to pay their housing costs. The basic TANF benefit in Maine continues to be very low. It has not increased since 2001. The maximum monthly benefit for a family of three is only $485 without the HSN payment. This is rarely enough to pay the mortgage or rent, let alone pay for the other basic necessities children need. The increase to the HSN payment will help families stretch their TANF grant further to meet their basic needs.

MaineCare for Certain Elderly and Disabled Individuals

The Governor proposed to eliminate the “ineligible spouse disregard” in the MaineCare program. This deduction of spousal income provides DHHS with some flexibility when determining MaineCare eligibility so that disabled and elderly individuals who are married can qualify for coverage when they have serious medical needs. The Legislature rejected the Governor’s proposal.

The State SSI Program for Immigrants and Refugees Saved

For the second time in his administration, the Governor proposed to eliminate the State Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program for immigrants and refugees. This vital state program provides income support for aged, blind and disabled immigrants who are ineligible for the federal SSI program. When the Maine Legislature created this program many years ago, they made it clear that Maine residents who are 65 years of age or older, or disabled should have access to this income support regardless of where they were born.

Community leaders and immigrants who receive State SSI came to the Legislature this session to tell their stories. In trying to make a life for themselves here at this point in their lives, this program may be their only source of income. It helps pay for rent, food, medicine and other basic necessities. In the end, compassion prevailed, their voices were heard and the Legislature voted to protect this important program.
New Program to Help With Rent and Property Taxes

The old “Property Tax and Rent Refund Program” is repealed

The old Property Tax and Rent Refund (or “Circuit Breaker”) program is gone.

The new “Property Tax Fairness Credit” is enacted

The Maine Legislature has replaced the Circuit Breaker program with a new tax credit program. It is called the “Property Tax Fairness Credit” program. It starts January 2014.

Here are some of the main features of the new credit:

- Most people will claim and get the credit when filing their state income tax return between January 1 and April 15, 2014. There is no longer a separate application. The 2013 Maine Income Tax Form 1040ME will include a Property Tax Fairness Worksheet to help you figure out if you can get help.

- If you do not normally file an income tax return, you can apply for the credit through either Maine Revenue Services or the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. More information on this later (after DHHS has set up its rules and procedures).

- The refund (now "credit") still will help both homeowners who pay property tax and renters.

- The maximum amount of the credit is much lower than under the Circuit Breaker program. For tax year 2013, the maximum credit is $300 ($400 for people 70 years of age or older).

- Due to stricter eligibility limits, many fewer people will get help with their property taxes or rent.

- The credit is "refundable." This means that you can get the help, even if you owe nothing in taxes (or owe less than the amount of the credit).

Who qualifies?

- You must own your own home or pay rent.

- You were a Maine resident during any part of the tax year.

- Your adjusted gross income for tax purposes is not more than $40,000.

- You paid property tax on your home in Maine that was more than 10% of your adjusted gross income OR you paid rent that was more than 40% of your adjusted gross income.
How is the credit calculated?

- For homeowners, the benefit is based on any property tax amount that is more than 10% of your adjusted gross income. Your credit is 40% of that amount. The most you can get is $300 ($400 if 70 years of age or older). For example, if your adjusted gross income is $30,000, your property taxes would need to be higher than $3000 to get any help. If your property taxes were $3500, with income of $30,000, you would get a $200 credit.

- The formula is the same for renters, except that your “property tax amount” is deemed to be 25% of the rent you paid during the tax year.

More details for renters

- If you get SSI or Social Security Disability, you may still qualify even if your rent is subsidized. Others receiving rent subsidies (such as a Section 8 voucher) will not qualify.

- The rental amount used does not include amounts paid for utilities, furniture rental, or other add-on charges. Only the amount charged for the basic “right of occupancy” is counted.

- The tax assessor can reduce the rental amount used for calculating the credit if the rental amount is deemed to be "excessive" (or not an "arm's length" deal made in the usual course of business).

You can contact Maine Revenue Services at 207-626-8475 weekdays, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm for help filing for the new tax credit. You can also go the Maine Revenue Services office at 51 Commerce Drive, Augusta, ME 04330.

Efforts to Improve Access to Dental Care Continue

MEJP joined many allies in several efforts to improve access to dental care during the past legislative session. Adult dental coverage under MaineCare, for example, is currently limited to treating pain or infection. The Legislature approved two proposals that would improve dental care for adults. Although these two measures passed, they did not receive funding to implement them. Both have been carried over to the next legislative session.

The Legislature also considered a bill that would allow Dental Hygiene Therapists to practice in Maine. The bill was supported by community action programs, dental hygienists, child advocacy groups, health centers, hospitals and many others. It did not pass, however but will be considered again during the next legislative session in January, 2014.

If you have had a hard time getting the dental care you or a family member needs, we want to hear from you. Please contact Ann Woloson at Maine Equal Justice Partners at 626-7058, ext. 210.

Madyson (center) with her grandmother, Kandie Desell, and House Speaker Mark Eves

Madyson, age 10, told legislators how important it is for people like her Mom to be able to get dental care.

“If she loses her teeth she won’t want to smile anymore. It will be harder for her to find work or to feel good about herself. When parents are hurting, it makes life harder for them and for their children. Please help change this.”
TANF/ASPIRE: Extensions and Assessments

As you may know, there is now a 60-month time limit in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. After receiving TANF for 60 months you need to qualify for an extension to keep getting TANF. Certain circumstances may allow you to get an extension. Examples of these situations include: having a disability that keeps you from working; having to stay home to care for a disabled family member; or if you are in a qualifying education or training program. You can see the full list of circumstances under which you can get an extension or circumstances under which parents are exempted from the time limits at http://www.mejp.org/content/tanf-time-limit-rules-intro.

If you time off TANF and cannot get an extension but then your circumstances change, you may be able to get TANF again. For example, if you lose TANF after receiving it for 60 months and a couple years later you become disabled you can apply for an extension based on your disability. Some people have had a hard time getting an extension when it seems like they should qualify. DHHS plans to make some changes to this problem. In the meantime, if you run into a problem you can contact Crystal Bond at Maine Equal Justice Partners – Toll Free: (866)626-7059, ext. 205.

DHHS is also going to implement a new assessment process in the ASPIRE program. This new process will do a better job at assessing each person’s individual situation. Then the program can do a better job providing the supports and services to help each family meet their goals. These changes are coming over this next year. Stay tuned for more information.
New Transportation System in MaineCare Gets Off to a Rocky Start

MaineCare has started a new system to help MaineCare members get to medical appointments, including rides to pharmacies. MaineCare Transportation “Brokers” have replaced the regional transportation agencies.

Under the new system, the Broker arranges for transportation to medical appointments and pharmacies whenever the MaineCare member needs the help. This could be when the member has no car, or needs help with paying for gas, or has a friend or relative who can drive, but needs some help with the cost of gas. The Broker is supposed to arrange for a driver if the member does not have ready access to transportation.

The Brokers are required to help set up transportation to medical appointments on just two days' notice. If you need urgent care, the Broker must respond even faster. (Urgent care is not emergency care. It is when you need to get to the doctor, other health care provider or pharmacy in the next day or two when something unexpected comes up.)

MaineCare members have a right to prompt service to and from their health care providers. MaineCare members have a right to help with transportation to go the nearest health care provider to meet the member's needs.

(Continued on Page 19, Transportation)

Transportation Brokers in Maine - Contact Information

- **Region 1:** All of Aroostook County, as well as Danforth and Patten  
  **Contact:** Coordinated Transportation Solutions, Inc. (CTS)  
  1-855-388-1068 to arrange transportation or file a complaint

- **Region 2:** All of Hancock County, including Isle au Haut, and all of Washington County excluding Danforth  
  **Contact:** Coordinated Transportation Solutions, Inc. (CTS)  
  1-855-388-1069 to arrange transportation or file a complaint

- **Region 3:** All of Penobscot County, excluding Patten; and all of Piscataquis County  
  **Contact:** Penquis  
  1-855-437-5883 to arrange transportation or 855-437-5884 to file a complaint

- **Region 4:** All of Kennebec County and all of Somerset County  
  **Contact:** Coordinated Transportation Solutions, Inc. (CTS)  
  1-855-388-1070 to arrange for transportation or file a complaint

- **Region 5:** All of Knox County, all of Lincoln County, all of Sagadahoc County, all of Waldo County, as well as Brunswick and Harpswell  
  **Contact:** Coordinated Transportation Solutions, Inc. (CTS)  
  1-855-388-1071 to arrange transportation or file a complaint

- **Region 6:** All of Cumberland County, except Brunswick and Harpswell  
  **Contact:** Coordinated Transportation Solutions, Inc. (CTS)  
  1-855-388-1072 to arrange transportation or file a complaint

- **Region 7:** All of Androscoggin County; all of Franklin County; and all of Oxford County except Porter, Hiram, Brownfield, Denmark, Sweden, Fryeburg, Lovell, Stow, and Stoneham.  
  **Contact:** Coordinated Transportation Solutions, Inc. (CTS)  
  1-855-388-1073 to arrange transportation or file a complaint

- **Region 8:** All of York County, and Porter, Hiram, Brownfield, Denmark, Sweden, Fryeburg, Lovell, Stow, and Stoneham  
  **Contact:** Logisticare Solutions, LLC  
  1-877-659-1302 to arrange transportation or 877-659-1303 to file a complaint.
Maine’s Chance to Provide Health Care to Nearly 70,000 Low-income Individuals – Vetoed by Governor LePage

Representative Linda Sanborn from Gorham sponsored a bill to require Maine to accept federal funds for MaineCare to cover 70,000 hard-working, low-income individuals. The bill (L.D. 1066, “An Act to Increase Access to Health Coverage and Qualify Maine for Federal Funding”) had support from Democrats, Republicans and Independents.

Despite this backing and strong public support, Governor LePage vetoed LD 1066. Two-thirds of the legislators in both the Maine House of Representatives and the Senate are needed to vote to override a Governor’s veto. The vote was very close, but fell just a few votes short of overriding the Governor’s veto.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) or “ObamaCare” provides states the chance to give Medicaid (MaineCare in Maine) to most people with income under 138% of the federal poverty level. This amounts to $15,857 in annual income for a single person. To get states to do this, the federal government set aside funds to help pay for the coverage. The federal funding for MaineCare would extend MaineCare to 45,000 currently uninsured individuals. It would also keep coverage for another 25,000 individuals who will lose their coverage as of January 1, 2014 because of cuts made to the MaineCare program in 2012.

Although Maine failed to take advantage of this historic opportunity in 2013, MEJP, along with the 85 other organizations that make up the Cover Maine Now! coalition, continues to advocate for extended coverage for 70,000 Mainers.

You can help secure health insurance for yourself, your neighbors, family and friends. If you are uninsured or will lose MaineCare coverage at the end of 2013, we want to hear from you. Please call us at 207.626.7058 x 205 or go to www.covermainenow.org and share your story.
Starting January 1, 2014, the Affordable Care Act (ACA or ObamaCare) will help many people get affordable health care.

To help people buy insurance, there will be “Marketplaces” (also referred to as a health insurance “exchange”). This will be where people can shop for insurance plans that meet their health care needs. It will be easy for people to compare one plan to another, to decide what is best for them.

Starting October 1st individuals and small businesses can sign up for an insurance plan through the Marketplace. In order to purchase private health insurance, individuals must “apply” during a specified time, which is called “open enrollment”. Open enrollment begins October 1, 2013 and ends in March 2014. Coverage will take effect as of January 1, 2014.

To make health insurance more affordable, people with income between 100% and 400% of the federal poverty level (FPL) will be eligible for help to pay their premiums. The 100% level for 2013 amounts to $11,490 a year for individuals and $19,530 for a family of three. At 400% FPL an individual may earn $45,960 a year and a family of three may have an income of $78,120. People with income below 250% ($28,725 for individuals and $48,825 for a family of three) will also get help with cost sharing. This means help with co-payments, deductibles and co-insurance.

It’s estimated, for example, that a family of three with an annual income of around $29,295 would pay about $1,172 for premiums (about $97 a month) in 2014 for coverage through the Marketplace. This family would be eligible for about $6,781 in tax subsidy credits to help pay the rest of the premium. Out-of-pocket costs for the year would be limited to $4,500. Preventive services will be covered completely; there are no co-payments or a deductible. Other out-of-pocket expenses will depend on what services are used – many people won’t spend anywhere near the limit. Premium and out-of-pocket costs may be lower or higher, depending on the level of coverage purchased.

While most people who do not have other coverage will now have to buy private health insurance or pay a tax, some people will not. If you make less than 133% of the federal poverty level ($15,282 for individuals or $25,975 for a family of three), you do not have to buy insurance. If insurance would cost you more than 8% of your annual income, then you also do not have to buy insurance. Others who don’t have to buy coverage include people who are:

- part of a religion opposed to accepting benefits offered through health insurance

(Continued on Page 15, ACA)
Nearly 25,000 parents and childless adults will lose their MaineCare coverage in January 2014.

Eligibility for Parents

Parents between 100-133% FPL (between $19,530 and $25,975 for a family of 3) continue to be eligible for MaineCare through December 2013. As of January 2014, these parents will no longer be protected by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and they will lose their MaineCare.

Eligibility for Childless Adults ("Non-Categoricals")

In February 2012, enrollment in the Childless Adult waiver program was frozen. People who were enrolled at the time remained eligible, but no new people could enroll. There are now about 10,000 MaineCare members in this group. They will lose their MaineCare when the Childless Adult waiver expires at the end of 2013.

This means that about 14,500 parents and nearly 10,000 childless adults will lose their MaineCare at the end of 2013. This will create hardship that could have been avoided.

If the Governor had not vetoed the bill to expand Medicaid—LD 1066—these parents and childless adults would have maintained their coverage. In addition, an estimated 45,000 people would have gained coverage, including 25,000 adults currently on the wait list for the Childless Adult waiver program.

Options for People Losing Their MaineCare

Parents between 100-133% FPL who lose MaineCare in January 2014 may qualify for “Transitional MaineCare”. If they are working or receiving child support when they lose their regular MaineCare benefits they may get Transitional MaineCare, which can last for 3, 6, or 12 months depending on the family’s circumstances. After their Transitional MaineCare expires they may be eligible for subsidies from the federal government to help pay for health insurance in the new Marketplace.

Childless Adults below 100% FPL who lose MaineCare in January 2014 will have fewer options. These adults cannot get Transitional Medicaid. They will not qualify for subsidies in the new health insurance Marketplace.

(Continued on Page 19, MaineCare)
Have you ever waited in line for hours before talking to a caseworker at DHHS? Have you ever left a message for your case worker and then waited for days before getting a call back?

If you answered yes to these questions, you are not alone. Caseworkers at DHHS often have way too many cases to give each case the attention it deserves. DHHS is making some big changes to address this problem. They are switching from a case worker model to a statewide call center model. Here are some of the ways it is going to work:

- You will no longer have a single case worker. Instead, all DHHS caseworkers will be able to help you with your case.
- All mail sent to DHHS will be scanned into a statewide database so that any worker will be able to discuss your case with you.
- When you call DHHS you may talk with a worker at your local office or you may talk with a worker in another part of the state.
- You will still be able to go to your local DHHS office but you will not necessarily meet with the same person every time.

This new model will allow DHHS offices to share the work load more evenly. The conversion to the new system should be completed within the next few months.

Kiosks – another way to apply for benefits

You also may have noticed kiosks in the DHHS offices. They look a bit like ATM machines but instead of managing money they can be used to apply for assistance. You might choose to use a kiosk if you don’t want to wait to meet with a caseworker. DHHS staff should be available to assist you if you have any questions.

My Maine Connection – more features coming soon

My Maine Connection, the DHHS website where you can screen for eligibility and apply for public benefit programs online is also making some changes. Coming soon, you will be able to:

- update your personal information. If your address changes, for example, you will be able to update it online without having to contact a DHHS caseworker.
- check your current benefits.
- go “paperless” by choosing electronic notification. Instead of receiving notices in the mail you will receive them on My Maine Connection. If you miss an electronic notice, DHHS will send you a reminder in the mail to let you know that you have a notice that you have not viewed yet.

(Continued on Page 15, DHHS)
Maine Equal Justice has been involved in three federal class action cases this year. Class actions are brought on behalf of all people who are in the same situation. In each of these cases, MEJP works with other attorneys.

- **Van Meter v. Mayhew.** MEJP continues to oversee the settlement that was reached in this class action. The settlement provides opportunities for people with cerebral palsy and other developmental disabilities to:
  - move out of nursing homes into home and community settings, or
  - remain in nursing homes, but get more services. These services are to help increase independence.

- **Bruns, et. al. v. Mayhew.** This federal class action is on appeal at the First Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston. The case challenges the Maine law that cut off MaineCare coverage for legal immigrants who have been in the U.S. for less than 5 years. The case started with Hans Bruns, a German native who has lived in Maine for a number of years. Hans was diagnosed with cancer. He was not able to get the treatment that he needed after Maine passed a law barring certain legal immigrants from getting MaineCare. The federal district court in Maine decided that Maine’s new law did not violate Equal Protection by denying health care services to legal immigrants while providing those services to citizens. MEJP has appealed this case to the First Circuit.

- **Bourgoin, et. al. v. Sebelius.** This class action is in the federal district court for Maine. MEJP is challenging the January 2013 decision of Katherine Sebelius, the Secretary for the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Secretary Sebelius allowed Maine to cut MaineCare benefits to more than 6000 elderly and disabled people who get help paying their Medicare premiums, coinsurance, deductibles and copayments. This help is through the Medicare Buy-In or Medicare Savings Program. MEJP’s claim is that this decision violates the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA). The ACA prohibits states from reducing MaineCare eligibility for low-income and disabled people until at least January, 2014. MEJP is awaiting the Court’s decision.
(Continued from Page 11, ACA)

- undocumented immigrants
- incarcerated
- a member of an Indian tribe
- below the family income threshold required for filing a tax return ($10,000 for an individual and $20,000 for a family in 2013)
- enrolled in a plan which satisfies the requirement of having health insurance through other sources

How to apply

Starting October 1, 2013, you can apply for insurance in the Marketplace in three ways: online, by mail, or in-person. A “Navigator” or other qualified person, including an “assistor”, a “certified application counselor” or a licensed insurance broker can help you apply. In addition, telephone and online chat will be available 24/7 to help you complete your application.

Maine will have a federally-facilitated Marketplace, meaning the federal government will run the Marketplace, not the State of Maine. Maine will have two insurance companies offering health insurance on the Marketplace: Maine Health Community Options and Anthem. The Marketplace is also a place where you can find out if you are eligible for Medicaid.

To learn more about the Marketplace go to www.healthcare.gov. As of October 1, 2013, you can compare plans and apply for coverage through this site and see if you are eligible for Medicaid coverage. Maine can also take steps to accept federal funds to expand MaineCare coverage for people with low-income. *(To learn more about how you can help make this happen, go to Page 10).*

(Continued from Page 13, DHHS)

According to DHHS, electronic updating and notification will be available in September. Sometime later this year you should also be able to scan your documents and upload them directly to My Maine Connection without having to go to a DHHS office.

As these changes go into place there may be some ‘speed bumps’ along the way. If you run into any problems, you can contact the My Maine Connection Helpdesk at 1-855-797-4357 or mmchelp.dhhs@maine.gov. If that does not resolve your issue you can contact Crystal Bond at Maine Equal Justice Partners – Toll Free: (866)626-7059, ext. 205.

(Continued from Page 1, Ann)

Most recently Ann was the Executive Director of Prescription Policy Choices, a Maine-based organization that provides research and information on prescription drug policies. Some of you may remember Ann from her days at the legislature when she served as Chief of Staff for Senate Majority Leaders Michael Brennan and Sharon Treat. She has also held senior positions at Consumers for Affordable Health Care and the Maine Children’s Alliance and worked as a policy writer for Maine’s Medicaid Program for several years.

Ann is a passionate advocate for social and economic justice for all Mainers; we are thrilled to have her on board. Welcome, Ann! 🌐
Leadership
It has been a busy year here at Maine Association of Interdependent Neighborhoods (MAIN). The year started out with 3 leaders, but early on one of our leaders had to step down. MEJP and MAIN thank Rachel and Kandie for continuing to do all they can. We are always looking for more folks to step up and join our great leadership team.

Expanded Health Care Coverage
As our meetings ended for the summer months, Maine people lost the initial battle to expand MaineCare. Upon our return in September, MAIN members will be ready to continue our efforts win health care coverage for 70,000 Maine people in 2014.

Valentine’s Day positives
On Valentine’s Day, we sent heart-shaped, positive messages to the Governor and Appropriations Committee members in thanks for their hard work. Since their job is not always easy, we felt that sending positive notes showed appreciation for all they do for the people of Maine.

Testifying at the Legislature
MAIN members, in collaboration with MEJP, testified on many bills this past session. Many individuals participated in the process by testifying on issues affecting all of us. Thank you!

We encourage more MAIN members and friends to step up when future testimonies are needed. MAIN and MEJP are available to help make the testifying process as easy as possible.

Recognition
Early this summer, MAIN awarded a certificate of appreciation to Madysen G., a 10 yr old, who testified on the dental bill sponsored by Rep. Mark Eves and helped out last fall with our conference at the State House.

MAIN leadership is excited to announce the start of a monthly “Special Recognition”. We will recognize an individual who is doing something special in their neighborhood or community to help others with a certificate of appreciation.

We need your help in finding deserving nominees. PLEASE let us know your suggestions by emailing or calling MAIN leadership (contact information on page 17).

Moving into the Future
MAIN is now on Facebook and we have more than doubled our “likes”. Join us by going to www.mejp.org, clicking on the MAIN tab and selecting visit MAIN on Facebook.

Finances
In the coming year, MAIN plans to increase incoming donations and hopefully qualify for a grant. We encourage everyone to help in this effort. The funds received help MAIN members reach out to more people and continue our work. Specifically, the funds are used to cover costs such as transportation, child care, food, postage, handouts, etc. We welcome donations of any size; every dollar helps!
Dear members & friends,

As we all know times are rough right now. Too many of our friends and neighbors living on low-to-moderate income are barely keeping their heads above water. This needs to change. We need your help to make it happen.

This past legislative session we worked together to fight proposed budget cuts. We did not get all we wanted, however we did succeed in helping keep it from being as devastating as it would have been. We fought hard to get the Governor to accept the federal dollars that would allow for MaineCare expansion, but at this point he has not waivered. However, we have not given up on this fight.

Several of you stepped up when asked and we all fought hard. Had we not worked together, it would have been much worse. Thanks to all of our members and allies who communicated with legislators; some heard us and others did not. Too much time was spent with our government leaders not working together. This does not solve the problems in MaineCare or other programs. This behavior will hurt families who are already struggling to get by and cause even more uncertainty in our economy.

We must elect legislators who will work for the benefit of all their constituents including those with low-to-moderate income. We hope you will continue to be active in MAIN so we can work for good, effective safety net programs and for a more fair economy in general.

For over a quarter of a century, MAIN members have worked together to make sure the voices of people with low income are heard by those making decisions that affect their lives. As an all-volunteer organization led by people with low income, we value our members. We recognize we would not be able to do what we do without YOU!

Please renew your membership or join us as a new member by filling out the member survey and returning it to us. Your contributions, financial or other, can help MAIN do what needs to be done to support our goals and keep MAIN strong!

Tell us how YOU want to be part of MAIN’s work!

We appreciate whatever donation you can make but even if you can’t make a donation, please fill out and return the MAIN member survey in this newsletter.

Together, we can and do make a difference!

Thanks for your support!

MAIN Leadership Team: Kandie Desell and Rachel Ridenour
Phone: (207) 330-5554
Email: contact.main.team@gmail.com
In response to the economic downturn, the 2009 Recovery Act (ARRA) increased Food Supplement (FS) benefits (formerly called Food Stamps) to ease the economic hardship that many Americans were facing. In April 2009 the maximum monthly food benefit increased by 13.6%. A single person household received an additional $24 a month and a family of 3 received an additional $63 a month. Those people who qualified for ‘the minimum monthly benefit’ saw an increase from $14 to $16 a month.

This 2009 increase in FS benefits was meant to be only temporary. Monthly benefits will decrease, starting November 1, 2013. A single person will lose $11 and a family of 3 will lose $29 of their monthly benefit.

This November cut will affect all of the approximately 130,000 Maine households that receive FS benefits. DHHS will send a notice to all households before November, letting people know the amount of the cut to their benefit.

Some families and individuals may need help from a food pantry to make up this loss. You can find a list of food pantries that may be able to provide some help at: [http://www.maine.gov/agriculture/co/tefap/bytown.shtml](http://www.maine.gov/agriculture/co/tefap/bytown.shtml) or [http://gsfb.org/help/food-map/](http://gsfb.org/help/food-map/). If you do not have access to a computer you can call 2-1-1. 2-1-1 is a statewide directory of more than 8,000 health and human services available in Maine. The toll free 2-1-1 hotline connects callers to trained call specialists who can help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
This is because Congress intended that very low-income people would be insured by Medicaid through the ACA. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court made this coverage optional for states in its ruling earlier this year. The Maine Legislature did vote to expand coverage but the Governor vetoed the law. As a result, many adults under the poverty level will not be able to get MaineCare. They will probably not be able to afford health insurance through the new Marketplace either.

If you lose your MaineCare and need help with healthcare costs, you can call the Consumers for Affordable Health Care HelpLine at 1-800-965-7476. They can help you find out what kind of help you can get to pay for health care.

Maine Equal Justice would also like to hear your story. It could help us advocate for Medicaid expansion in 2014. Please call Crystal Bond at Maine Equal Justice Partners at 1-866-626-7059, ext. 205 if you have a story to share.

MaineShare

Maine Equal Justice is a proud member of MaineShare, a workplace giving program to make Maine work better!

www.maineshare.org
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Contact Maine Equal Justice. Call toll-free 1-866-626-7059 or email crusnova@mejp.org

Want to be on our mailing list or on our e-mail network?