



“LIFT” and “STEP” bills move families with children out of poverty while strengthening Maine’s workforce

Mainers all have a stake in addressing child poverty

The Invest in Tomorrow initiative is driven by a broad network of organizations and individuals across the state who have come together to ensure all Maine families with children can meet their basic needs and have opportunities for good jobs and a brighter future.¹

Today nearly one in eight Maine children is growing up poor.² One out of every five is food insecure, living in families that worry whether they will have enough to eat.³ Child poverty weighs all of us down – it challenges our schools, our health care system, our communities, and our economy.

Mainers all have a stake in addressing child poverty. We all want to see Maine children thrive, and in doing so we can strengthen our families, our communities, and our workforce.

That’s why Invest in Tomorrow supports a bi-partisan bill package that takes meaningful steps to increase security and opportunity for Maine kids:

An Act to Reduce Child Poverty by Leveraging Investments so Families can Thrive (LIFT), sponsored by House Speaker Sara Gideon (D-Freeport) will:

► **Improve access to the Parents as Scholars (PaS)** program by allowing schools to enroll low-income parents so they can get a degree or industry-recognized credential, providing a pathway out of poverty and helping to address Maine’s workforce shortage.

► **Eliminate the “gross income test”** in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which prevents families struggling with poverty from accessing temporary assistance. Right now, a family of three making over \$12,276/yr can’t get help from TANF even though they are living far below the poverty level of \$21,330/yr. When you lift the gross income test, a family of three making up to \$18,780/yr could access this critical support to help meet basic needs and get help finding a job, education, or training.

► **Establish a Working Group** to make improvements at DHHS to help make government accountable to all of us and ensure that programs are working to help LIFT families out of poverty.



Investing in parents transforms families

Allina Diaz is working her way through college as a single mom with three kids in the Parents as Scholars program. Allina can see the change in her daughters as they witness her progress in school: “They are seeing it on a daily basis – that education is important, that loving yourself is important, that valuing yourself is important, having a purpose. That is my goal – to be able to stop that cycle and for them to experience life in a different way than I had to.”

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➤ **Require DHHS to measure and track Maine's progress** toward ensuring that families get the help they need by setting targets for improvement in anti-poverty programs and tracking progress for accountability.

➤ **Authorize DHHS to streamline eligibility for Transitional Medicaid** for working families leaving TANF so more families have continuity of care – this would help address the cliff effect in TANF and Medicaid.

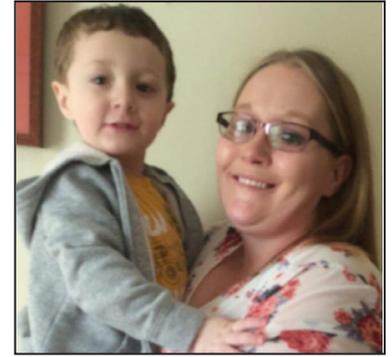
An Act to Secure Transitions to Economic Prosperity for Maine Families and Children (STEP), sponsored by Assistant Minority Leader Trey Stewart (R-Presque Isle), will:

➤ **Invest in the “Whole Family Economic Security Initiatives”** approach to service delivery, which combines supports for post-secondary education and workforce development for parents with quality early care and education for children, all while ensuring that families can meet their basic needs.

➤ **Significantly reduce the “benefits cliff”** families face when they transition off TANF into employment. Benefits “cliffs” can occur when a family's increase in earnings results in a sudden loss of benefits.

➤ **Parents and caregivers could count GED coursework** and programs that assist people in earning a GED toward meeting eligibility requirements as part of the first 20 hours of their weekly work requirements in TANF. Prioritizing education helps move families toward greater economic opportunity.

➤ **Authorize DHHS to increase the amount of Transitional Food Assistance** for working families who are transitioning from TANF to employment, to address high rates of hunger.



Parents need a bridge to work, not a benefits “cliff”

Casey Henderson is a young mother who is working her way through college after recovery from addiction. She has faced the benefits “cliff” which can make it hard to transition from health care, housing, food or income supports to work because of the sudden loss of critical help.

“A few months ago, I had to work extra to pay rent, but if I work an extra 15 hours I am no longer eligible for [TANF]...There are supports that help me and so many others get a little bit ahead. But for so many of us there's no bridge, just a cliff.”

Why Invest in Tomorrow Supports LIFT + STEP

Invest in Tomorrow envisions a world in which families can meet their basic needs to thrive and find gainful, sustainable employment, lifting their families out of poverty and setting us all on a better path. To that end, we have identified promising policy solutions like LIFT and STEP that could increase the likelihood that every Maine child gets what they need to have a fair shot at a bright future.

Data dashboard and more at investintomorrow.me

1 The Invest in Tomorrow Steering Committee includes Community Concepts, Maine Community Action Association, Maine Community Foundation, Maine Children's Alliance, Maine Equal Justice, Maine State Chamber of Commerce, Maine Women's Lobby, and Penquis.

2 The 2019 poverty level for a family of three is \$21,330, however, the mean income deficit for Maine families in poverty was \$9,011 in 2017, the year for which the most recent data is available. The mean income deficit is the difference in dollars between household income and a family's poverty threshold. By using the 2017 mean deficit as an approximation, we estimate that the average household income for a Maine family of three below the poverty level is approximately \$12,300. U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

3 Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine. (n.d.). Hunger | Ending Hunger in Maine. Retrieved November 19, 2018, from <https://www.gsfb.org/hunger-in-maine/>