

COMPASSIONATE, WORK-FIRST WELFARE REFORM

- Target assistance to priority populations and align Maine welfare benefits with the vast majority of other states
 - Background
 - Maine is one of just a handful of states that provides all state-funded welfare benefits, including TANF cash assistance, food supplement and Medicaid benefits, to legal non-citizens during the first five years they are in America. In 1996, the federal government prohibited any federal money for welfare benefits to legal non-citizens during the first five years. Officials wanted to ensure people would not come to America and have access to the safety net immediately, but only after a reasonable period of time.
 - Reform
 - The budget eliminates coverage for legal non-citizens during their first five years, savings taxpayers \$19.5 million over the biennium.
- Increase accountability and help individuals move from addiction to recovery and self-sufficiency
 - Background
 - Maine is one of just a few states that provides welfare benefits, including TANF cash assistance and food supplement, to convicted drug felons with no requirements for addiction treatment and/or regular drug testing. The federal government, as part of its 1996 welfare reform legislation, prohibited any federal money for benefits to convicted drug felons, but gave states the ability to opt out of this federal ban or mandate testing.
 - Reform
 - The budget requires convicted drug felons to have regular testing and addiction treatment if receiving TANF cash assistance or food supplement. Since the Department of Health and Human Services does not currently track how many convicted drug felons receive welfare benefits, the size of the population impacted is unknown at this time. However, if the goal of a successful welfare programs is to reward hard work and self-sufficiency, and to transition parents and families on to a better life, it is critical the State track, treat and hold accountable those with drug addictions and substance abuse.

- Have a firm time limit on benefits and align Maine welfare with the vast majority of other states
 - Background
 - Maine is just one of a handful states that does not have a strict five-year time limit on TANF cash assistance. Without firm deadlines, many individuals lack the incentives and accountability necessary for the state to encourage hard work and to move their families on to a better life.
 - Reform

The budget requires a strict five year time-limit on benefits and provides a six-month grace period for those currently receiving benefits beyond the five-year limit.

- Have the name of Maine’s welfare division match its new mission
 - Background
 - The previous administration renamed the Bureau of Family Independence to become the Office for Integrated Access and Support (OIAS).
 - Reform

The budget renames the OIAS the Office for Family Independence.

- Reward hard work with firm work requirements for TANF recipients and align Maine welfare with the vast majority of other states.
 - Background
 - Currently, sanctions for non-compliance of ASPIRE work requirements are among the weakest in the nation. Only California has such weak sanctions for a family not meeting program, work, and job search requirements.
 - Reform

The budget requires that benefits are withheld until the individual meets TANF/ASPIRE job search and work requirements. Still, this maximum sanction is not as severe as the maximum sanction in 21 other states, when the case is closed completely for such non-compliance.