



Seeking Common Ground, Working for the Common Good

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www.maineCouncilofchurches.org

Rooted in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, our mission is to inspire congregations and people of faith to unite in good works that build a culture of justice, compassion, and peace.

Testimony in Opposition to Proposed Cuts to MaineCare in the State Budget

Specifically, the reduction of MaineCare eligibility from 200% to 133% of the Federal Poverty Rate and the elimination of the Non-Categorical Waiver.

May 11, 2011

Senator Rosen, Representative Flood, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Eric C. Smith, I reside in Portland and serve as the Associate Director of the Maine Council of Churches, here today representing the our nine member denominations. I am here today to remind you, as we often do, that budgets are moral documents: a prioritization of our values as a state and as a civil society. And I am here to say that Maine people must be Maine's priority. Healthcare for people - children, poor, elderly Maine people - is a basic concern for all of us, and affects all of us, economically and morally.

The proposed reduction in MaineCare eligibility and complete elimination of the non-categorical waiver would move an estimated 30,000 Maine people onto the rolls of the uninsured. This does not save us, the people of Maine, money, but rather shifts the cost of delayed care into emergency rooms and hospitals where we all pay more. More importantly, it comes at the expense our most basic values of respecting human dignity and our basic responsibility of caring for our neighbors.

Our ship of state needs to chart a course out of our present budget storm, and you are our navigators. But the people of Maine are not cargo. None of us can be cast overboard so that some of us can move on to prosperity. We, the people, are the ship, and we're all going to get where we're going together. Casting off parts of the ship doesn't make any of us safer. These proposals are not reform. As our board president said earlier today in the Hall of Flags, "Cutting people off from public benefits is not "reform" any more than suddenly pulling a rug out from under someone is inviting them to sit down and rest."

You are faced with choices of whether we move forward as a healthier state or a sick and suffering state. I believe this choice of how we are going to care for our most vulnerable citizens must be made long before discussing tax expenditures that benefit the most wealthy citizens. Cutting spending for the poor to increase spending for the rich leaves us all morally bankrupt.

I urge you to work together to find solutions to reform services rather than eliminate them, and to mend our social safety net rather than widening the holes. Thank you for your time and your service in this difficult task for the people of Maine.