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# MOVING MAINE FORWARD

For people of faith, the most important question to be answered when confronted with the facts of poverty in Maine is, simply, “how are we called in this moment to love and serve our neighbor?”

Contrary to the myths of me-first consumerism, fear of the stranger and blaming “the other,” we have the Great Story of God’s love for us that knows no bounds, a love that calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves. We believe that even as we work together to improve the economy of Maine, we cannot afford to ignore the moral economy that, in the long run, is the basis for our quality of life in community.

The first step is to tell the truth: too many Mainers are suffering from poverty and lack of opportunity. The next step is to ask: what must change -- in ourselves and in our collective response -- to meet the challenges we face now.

**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 critical services like health care, affordable child care and education and training.

**But...conversations about ‘welfare’ today are too often driven by anecdotes and stereotypes-taking the stories of a few and unfairly generalizing them to all poor families.**

**Please help us improve our public benefit programs - based on facts - to help Maine families not hurt them.**



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## The Truth About Public Assistance...

Public assistance (TANF)\* does not foster dependency and complacency. The median length of time on the program is only 18 months. 97% of recipients have had an average of three jobs in the past five years.

People are not moving to Maine for our generous public benefits. The maximum TANF benefit for a family of three is \$485 per month, that's 32% of the federal poverty level - the lowest in New England.

Less than 1% of all 2010 recipients of public benefits came to Maine from another state. From 2008 through July 2010, nearly twice as many aid recipients left Maine each month compared to the number who moved to Maine.

### Did you know?

- 1 in 9 Maine people lives below the federal poverty level (\$18,530/year for a family of three).
- 1 in 6 Maine children lives in poverty.
- Maine has the 2nd highest rate of "very low food security" in the nation.

\*When people talk about "welfare" they are usually talking about the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, or TANF.

TANF provides financial assistance to over 25,000 Maine children and their families as they struggle to make ends meet during tough times.

92% of recipients are women raising young children on their own—the median age of a child is just two years old.

For more information, ideas on how you can help, or to download this flyer, go to: [www.maineCouncilofchurches.org](http://www.maineCouncilofchurches.org)

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### Families turn to TANF because of...

- Instability of work in the low-wage labor market, as they struggle to sustain employment with low pay, irregular hours, and difficulty balancing work and family.
- Illness and disability that often prevent them from working or sustaining employment.
- Sudden economic disruption resulting from divorce, separation or the need to flee an abusive situation.

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