



**Testimony from Suzanne McCormick on behalf of United Way of Greater Portland
on “DHHS – MaineCare Emergency Supplemental Budget” L.R. 2678**

Senator Rosen, Representative Flood and members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Senator McCormick, Representative Strang Burgess and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Suzanne McCormick and I am speaking today on behalf of United Way of Greater Portland about the cuts proposed in the Governor’s Supplemental Budget for the Department of Health and Human Services.

We are here today to share our concern about the magnitude of these cuts and the vulnerability of the people who rely on these services. As a partner with the state in funding prevention and primary services for children and families, elderly citizens and adults, we recognize the vital importance of the state’s role in funding essential programs and services. United Way funding can *supplement* but not *supplant* state funds.

These wide-ranging cuts threaten to increase homelessness dramatically and push more children and families into more desperate circumstances with no safety net at all. The cost of providing support will shift to local communities and nonprofit organizations, and our ability to respond is limited.

The current situation is already dire. On the heels of this prolonged recession, individuals and families in our communities continue to struggle with homelessness and an inability to meet their basic needs. Since July 2009, there have been more than 5,000 intakes at Portland’s homeless shelters for men, women, youth and families. Thirty-five percent reported experiencing homelessness for the first time. Despite very successful re-housing efforts, our shelters are overflowing, as are our soup kitchens and meal programs. Providers including the City of Portland’s Social Services, Preble Street, Family Crisis Services and Milestone Foundation are straining to keep up with the demand. Greater Portland is not alone, communities across the state are experiencing similar increased demand.

The proposed cuts to MaineCare coverage will hurt parents, childless and young adults. They will also cost taxpayers more, due to the increased costs of homelessness, emergency room visits, and job loss. The closure of Private Non-Medical Institutions also threatens to increase homelessness. Many of the 6,000 Maine people living in Private Non-Medical Institutions would not have a home were it not for the stable supportive housing they receive through community-based residential facilities.

The loss of coverage for non-categoricals will specifically hit Portland’s Health Care for the Homeless Clinic which has seen nearly 1,500 clients in six months. For half of these clients, MaineCare is the only source of payment and the other half have no or limited resources. The elimination of Targeted Case Management will eliminate case management services at our shelters.

One of the best prevention opportunities we have is to promote the healthy development of our children through quality Child Care, Home Visiting and Head Start. These investments are a down payment on a future productive workforce. As partners with the state in supporting these programs, we applaud the Streamlining Task Force for their support of Head Start and Early Head Start and we urge you to continue state support for early care and education programs. Maine’s most vulnerable children and families benefit and Maine communities prosper when our children and families thrive.

We recognize the difficult budget pressures the state is facing. Decisions of this magnitude should be considered in the context of the entire state budget with adequate time to consider alternatives and fully analyze the impact of these cuts. We are ready to help in any way we can.

Thank you for your time, leadership and service.