

Testimony in Support of LD 214

March 14, 2019

Senator Carpenter, Representative Bailey, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Ronald Jarrett, and I am the Director of Public Policy & Advocacy at United Way of Greater Portland (UWGP). I am here today, on behalf of UWGP, to testify in support of LD 214, “An Act to Increase Funding for Civil Legal Services.”

Thrive2027 is our community’s commitment to make Cumberland County stronger for everyone who calls it home. Powered by UWGP, more than 225 business, non-profit, public, and community organizations have endorsed three 10-year goals that promise measurable and meaningful change in Greater Portland. These three goals ensure that:

- Goal 1: More children have a strong start in school so that they are reading at grade level by the end of third grade. By 2027, we aim to have 70% of children reading at grade level by the end of third grade; currently, only 56% of Cumberland County children read proficiently at the end of third grade.
- Goal 2: More people have the education and employment opportunities they need to be able to live and work in Greater Portland. By 2027, we aim to have 70% of households paying less than 30% of their income on housing; currently, only 15% of low-income households in Cumberland County pay less than 30% of their income on housing.
- Goal 3: More of our neighbors live longer, healthier lives. By 2027, we are aiming for a 10% reduction in preventable premature deaths.

In order for our friends, family, and neighbors to secure public benefits, safe housing, healthcare, employment, debt relief, and protection from abuse, some may require a lawyer. When faced with financial exploitation, civil legal aid providers can provide assistance to help seniors recover stolen income or assets. Civil legal aid providers help low income seniors face an imminent loss of housing as a result of the denial or reduction in publicly funded long term care services. In order to reduce preventable premature death in our communities, we must treat stressful and traumatic experiences and reduce access to lethal means among at-risk individuals. Access to civil legal aid can ensure that victims of domestic violence have protection orders and/or “no guns” provisions for abuse perpetrators; ensuring the safety of children and families.

While organizations that currently provide civil legal aid in our county are positively impacting the financial stability and healthcare access of many individuals and families, it is clear that the ongoing need for services outweighs their current capacity to provide assistance.

LD 214 seeks to ensure that legal aid providers can take on at least 9,500 more cases per year and assist tens of thousands more through systemic advocacy, outreach, and education. Without representation, members of our community will not be able to thrive financially and live long and healthy lives. For these reasons and the others described above we respectfully encourage you to support LD 214.

Thank you for your leadership and service.