

## Testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

### Regarding LD 390, The Biennial Budget

By Nicole Evans, United Way of Greater Portland

March 1, 2017

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Nicole Evans and I am presenting testimony on behalf of United Way of Androscoggin County, United Way of Aroostook County, United Way of Eastern Maine, United Way of Greater Portland, United Way of Kennebec Valley, United Way of Mid Coast Maine, United Way of Mid-Maine, United Way of Oxford County, and United Way of York County (“United Way”) regarding LD 390, “An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2018 and June 30, 2019.” We oppose the proposed cuts to the Fund for a Healthy Maine and raise concerns about the lack of funding for the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) childhood lead poisoning program.

We recognize that you and your colleagues face difficult decisions in passing a biennial budget as well as in evaluating several public policy priorities worthy of consideration. We strongly believe that investments in the Fund for a Healthy Maine (“the Fund”) and continued support of the CDC’s childhood lead poisoning program represent essential investments in the long-term health of Maine people and the future of Maine’s workforce.

Research shows when people are healthy, children perform better in school, individuals are able to work, and families have more income to invest in the local economy. Businesses are also more successful when they have a healthy, productive workforce and incur lower health care-related costs for their employees. In fact, for each \$1 spent on disease prevention, we save \$5.60 in health spending and produce \$7.50 in economic output. Business leaders reinforce the economic case, encouraging lawmakers to make lowering health care costs a priority to support their efforts to spur new economic growth for Maine.<sup>1</sup> The Fund is a critical investment that will improve our state’s health and economic productivity.

The Fund supports district and statewide public health efforts, providing the necessary platform for communities to draw down private, state, and federal matching funds for education, prevention, school-based health care, local policy change, lead paint testing, and other traditional public health department services. Maine showed great wisdom and foresight when, in 1998, it set aside the payments from the tobacco settlement to support a robust public health system. The Fund has delivered a variety of benefits to Maine people since then – benefits that likely would not have been achieved without the Fund. These include efforts in tobacco prevention and cessation, expanded access to Head Start and child care, improved access to prescription drugs and dental care, prevention of substance abuse, and measures to address obesity.

United Ways across the state have long supported the Fund and its continued focus on prevention and education. In fact, United Way of Greater Portland is a founding partner of Let’s Go!, and has provided a

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<sup>1</sup> Maine Public Health Association

decade of programmatic and financial support for this nationally recognized childhood obesity prevention program on behalf of the state of Maine.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the proposed cuts to the Fund will eliminate Let's Go!, ending its progress and the progress of so many essential preventative programs, including the Maine CDC's statewide tobacco program.

The statewide tobacco program has helped to reduce Maine's youth smoking rate from one of the highest in the nation to one of the lowest. These proposed cuts to tobacco prevention and cessation services will lead to an 8.6% increase in youth smoking rates – causing an additional 1,320 more kids to die prematurely.<sup>3</sup> The impact of these cuts, and the increase in the youth smoking rate, will create an \$80.8M increase in future health care expenditures.<sup>4</sup>

These proposed cuts will impact every Maine community as they struggle to support the 500 individuals whose jobs will be eliminated as a result of the proposed cuts, and shoulder the implications of reduced health outcomes for the next generation.

For these reasons, we urge you to protect and maintain these successful public health programs. Please reject the cuts in the proposed budget.

### **Childhood Lead Program**

Lead poisoning is causing preventable, permanent damage to Maine children. The cognitive and neurological deficits related to lead poisoning on a child's IQ, and the effect of a reduced IQ on wages and lifetime income, will impact Maine's future leaders for decades.<sup>5</sup>

However, thanks to efforts in 2015, Maine law was changed to reduce the blood lead level requiring intervention from 15 ug/dl to the federal level of 5 ug/dl. This new standard provided hope for Maine's future economy, but requires continued support from CDC staff, and additional funding for inspections and testing. The program was fully funded in the last biennial budget, but is not fully funded in this proposed budget before you.

We believe that any fiscal burden outweighs the fully preventable and significant permanent and irreversible impacts of lead poisoning. Please fully fund this essential program in the budget.

United Ways will continue to be committed to improving health outcomes of Maine people, and committed to be partners in supporting healthy Maine communities. We urge you to oppose these cuts to the Fund for a Healthy Maine, and restore funding to support the CDC's childhood lead poisoning program.

Thank you for your time, leadership and service.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, visit [www.lets-go.org](http://www.lets-go.org).

<sup>3</sup> Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Davis, Mary E. 2009. "An Economic Cost Assessment of Environmentally-Related Childhood Diseases in Maine". University of Maine School of Economics. <https://umaine.edu/soe/files/2009/06/soe579.pdf>.