



Maine Public Health
Association

Testimony of the Maine Public Health Association

In Opposition to the Cuts to the Fund for a Healthy Maine and General Assistance contained in:

LR 2847, The Governor's Second Supplemental Budget

Senator Rosen, Representative Flood and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs; Senator McCormick, Representative Strang Burgess and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services; I am Tina Pettingill, Executive Director of the Maine Public Health Association, an organization of more than 350 members committed to creating an environment which sustains and improves the health and well-being of Maine residents. Our diverse membership has a common interest in the promotion and protection of the public's health. I am here today to oppose cuts contained within LR 2847 to the Fund for a Healthy Maine as well as to General Assistance.

First, we ask that the limited resources in the Fund for a Healthy Maine are put toward best practice, evidence-based prevention and health promotion efforts. I should note that MPHA does not receive any funds from the Fund for a Healthy Maine.

Prevention is the cornerstone of public health, and prevention works. Whether it is helping smokers quit, giving kids a healthy start, supporting new parents, helping families get active or teaching students about healthy choices, prevention provides the foundation for a healthier state. That means lower health care costs, and greater workforce productivity. A recent report from the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, demonstrates that for every \$1 spent on prevention in Maine, the return on investment is \$7.50 - the best rate of

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return for any state in the country.ⁱ Can you think of any other investment that we can spend \$1 and get a \$7.50 return? It's rare, but in Maine it is possible.

Maine has the best return on investment in the country because we have wisely invested in proven community-based programs through the Fund for a Healthy Maine. Head Start, School Based Health Centers, Healthy Maine Partnerships, Home Visitation, Oral Health are not the political flavor of the month, they are backed by science and recognized by authorities like the US CDC as best practice. The Maine Public Health Association and our members are deeply dismayed that once again, the Administration is offering up the Fund to solve a General Fund budget problem. This proposal diminishes the Fund and steals health and cost savings opportunities from the people of Maine.

MPHA also recognizes that many in Maine do not have the resources needed to live a healthy and secure life. These vulnerable members of our society need our help. Families who do not have enough income to pay for shelter or put healthy food on their table whether due to unemployment, a medical emergency or some other unforeseen event should not be limited in the amount of assistance they can seek. This is why MPHA opposes the limits on General Assistance proposed in this budget. Furthermore, if cities and towns are forced to dig into their property-tax based budgets to fund General Assistance, they may be forced to either raise property taxes or lay off employees—many who work to further public health goals.

There are other options, including many that would improve, rather than harm, public health such as equalizing the tax on tobacco products other than cigarettes. We are happy to discuss those and other revenue enhancing options with your committee at any time.

The Fund is our promise to the people of Maine that we will continue to acknowledge the golden opportunity the tobacco settlement dollars provide for preventing disease rather than paying for it after the fact.

On behalf of the 350 members of the Maine Public Health Association, I strongly urge you to oppose all cuts to the Fund for a Healthy Maine and General Assistance and put the health of Maine residents first.

Thank you for your time.

ⁱ Trust for America's Health. (2008). *Prevention for a Healthier America: Investments in Disease Prevention Yield Significant Savings, Stronger Communities.*