

**SEEDS OF PEACE
MAINE PROGRAM**

**Youth Charter
for the
State of Maine**

*Submitted to Governor John Baldacci
28 October 2003*

From July 22 to August 9, 2003, fourteen Seeds from the Maine Seeds program came together at Seeds of Peace International Camp in Otisfield, ME to discuss issues facing youth in Maine today. Inspired by Governor John Baldacci's inaugural address, which called for a Youth Summit to "examine why young people are leaving our state" and consider "what we can do to bring them back", these Seeds put pen to paper and composed a Youth Charter. While other Seeds participated in camp events, this group of leaders worked in cramped quarters to produce the document you now hold in your hands.

The Maine Seeds who participated in this project are:

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DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

We, the Maine Seeds, representing a variety of nations, religions and cultures present the following Youth Charter, which documents the issues currently facing the youth in our state.

The Seeds of Peace International program has included Maine teenagers for several years. In 2000, the Maine Seeds program was developed, uniting a group of fourteen teenagers from Portland to discuss ways to unite our diverse city. Though we are all residents of Maine, individually we come from diverse countries of origin, representing a variety of nationalities including: Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, Ireland, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Thailand, Togo, Uganda, Vietnam, and of course, the United States of America. Despite racial, ethnic and religious differences, we have grown together as a family over the past four years. As leaders in our communities we work to break down stereotypes and increase acceptance of difference. We run workshops and speak to various schools and community centers around the state, creating awareness about the issues in Portland – the same issues we address in this charter.

We have composed this charter from our own ideas and personal experiences, while also building on the issues highlighted by Governor Baldacci in his inaugural speech. In particular, we focus on concerns about diversity in the State of Maine. We also consider the importance of keeping youth in Maine in order to offset the increasingly older population.

To address the different issues that directly and indirectly impact Maine youth, we have created four committees: Diversity, Education, Economics, and Media. These committees have considered the most important issues facing Maine youth. As this charter indicates, we are committed to changing Maine's future today.

STATEMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON DIVERSITY

We, the Committee on Diversity, have concluded that diversity can either strengthen or divide a population. We believe that the negative effects of diversity can easily be avoided with tolerance and respect, which are the only ways to embrace ethnic, racial, religious and sexual diversity. Diversity can be a uniting factor, a reason why people want to learn about each other, a reason for people to connect. When diversity is properly embraced in Maine, there will be a noticeable decline in hate violence, creating an environment which is really **the way life should be.**

Supporting Diversity in Maine

Urban areas in Maine, such as Portland and Lewiston, have the most diverse population. Though it may be counter intuitive, Maine is significantly less diverse than it was one hundred years ago, according to James E. Tierney; however, 3.1% of Maine's population is foreign born, most of whom are Canadian born (<http://www.katahdinstitute.org/tierney-speech.html>). Compared to a nationwide estimate of 11.1% of foreign-born residents, Maine is significantly less diverse than other states in the United States (U.S. Census 2000). In 2000, 30.9% of U.S. residents identified themselves as non-white, which is a sharp contrast to Maine, where only **3.5%** of the population identifies as non-white. These figures demonstrate the homogeneity of Maine, despite the diversity in our urban locations. Maine is among the **whitest** states in the nation.

In the past few years, Arab-Americans and Muslims in Maine have been harassed and falsely accused of being terrorists. This behavior is no different than treating African Americans as criminals or Asian Americans as spies, which are common stereotypes. Our country has had a long history of mistreating minority populations, thus creating stereotypes that perpetuate common misconceptions. We believe that in our state ethnic and racial minorities are treated unequally and with less respect than the majority of the population. This mistreatment may be a result of fear among citizens. We believe this fear escalated as a result of September 11, 2001 – the day Americans became victims of foreign threats on home soil. The attacks on September 11th scared our country and our state, causing us to further isolate minority groups in order to make many Americans feel safe. Former refugees who sought a safe haven in the U.S. have been harassed and

targeted even though they are now citizens. Their citizenship has consequently been called into question having little merit over minority status.

Lewiston has been a target for white supremacist groups located within and outside of Maine. Since Mayor Raymond's letter to the Somali community (October 2002), many hate crimes have been committed against the Somalis in Lewiston and in Portland. Some of these hate crimes have been reported, others have not because victims fear retaliation. "The Many and One Rally", a celebration of the increased diversity in Lewiston, provided an important space to acknowledge ethnic, religious, and racial difference among Maine residents. However, nothing systematic has been done at the local or state level to support the integration of ethnic minorities into Maine communities.

Our society must not view immigration as a burden. This country was built on the principle of a "melting pot", welcoming different peoples in search of freedom from persecution and of a better life. Immigration brings diversity to our state and nation. If the proper programs and assistance are available for new arrivals to the U.S., immigrants can make active and effective contributions to the economic and social fabric of our country. The U.S. has agreed to resettle refugees. However, the recent concern about settling Somali Bantus in Holyoke, MA indicates an unwillingness to accept populations of non-European descent. The Lewiston Mayor's letter to the Somali secondary migrants is just another example of this resistance.

Many immigrants who come to Maine are professionals in their home countries and can contribute their skills here. Having distinct educational and cultural backgrounds means that even though people are trained to do a similar task, they may not do the task in the same manner; incorporating these different perspectives may be an advantage to businesses that take the time to cater to these diverse skills.

An often overlooked element of diversity in Maine is the disparity in the population density and economic status between northern and southern Maine. The northern part of the state has a lower population density, with fewer jobs available. This half of the state may not welcome refugees and immigrants due to the current economic situation. The southern part of the state has a much higher population density. Schools are overcrowded and affordable housing is difficult to find. The southern half of the state does not want to house immigrants or refugees either, yet has been

forced to do so because northern Maine cannot support these communities. Building up northern Maine and embracing diversity there would create more job opportunities for immigrants and refugees; it would improve the economy of that part of the state and reduce the burden on the southern half.

Diversity in Government

Currently the majority of civil servants in the state government are Caucasian. The Committee on Diversity believes that the state government must reflect the changing demographics in Maine. We must encourage greater representation of minorities at the local and state level. When a decision about the future of the state is made, in Congress or the Senate, very rarely is there input from minorities or the communities they represent. More racial and ethnic diversity in decisions regarding minorities would lead to a more balanced and fair decision making process. A more diverse state government can aid in reducing prejudice and embracing diversity. The government will function in a more respectful manner towards racially, religiously, and sexually diverse populations if they know that government officials are holding the state accountable for how its actions and decisions affect minorities. A diverse government creates a wider range of perspectives, and a much wider knowledge base on a variety of issues. Diversity in the government is a way to create a decision making which is fair for the state population.

Hate Crimes and Civil Rights

Hate crimes have the ability to divide our citizens and distort our society. Hate crimes are caused by intolerance, fear of change, and a lack of respect for individuals. To compensate for a fear of diversity, some people transfer their fear to those who are different from the majority, thereby denigrating others to attain personal power. Those responsible for hate crimes use slogans, campaigns, slurs and criminal acts to imply that they are the victims and those they fear a threat. People who justify their hatred by claiming a lack of exposure to difference find it easier to hate than to understand what is different.

The Hate Crime Statistics Act (as amended 1996, 28 USC sec. 534) defines a hate crime as any crime which “shows feasible evidence of prejudice based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity”; this includes crimes of murder, non-negligent manslaughter, forcible

rape, aggravated assault, simple assault, intimidation, arson, and destruction, damage or vandalism of property.

One source of hate crimes can be the very institution that provides our communities with protection – our police. As with any member of a community, those who join law enforcement may enter it with personal biases. In their position, however, the police have a greater responsibility to control their potential biases. Law Enforcement can do a disservice to their community if they let their prejudices get in the way of their jobs. Such situations have a higher potential to occur in a diverse environment where the police force may misunderstand the culture and traditions of the local ethnic communities and respond excessively out of fear.

If police officers misuse their authority they send the wrong message to our children. As a Committee we acknowledge the 300 Maine Officers who have been certified as civil rights officers in a program that includes training in diversity and hate crimes. But 300 officers are not enough. So long as some officers act in a biased way, kids get the message that it is okay to make other people feel ashamed because they are different. It is a travesty that racism and prejudice start at such a young age due to poor role models. Police are not the only ones displaying poor behavior. However, police are meant to enforce the laws; consequently, when police officers break the law, it is particularly destructive to communities.

In an effort to avoid prejudice, communities must decide not to judge people based on their ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religion, or national origin, because these traits do not define a person's character. However, the government can only punish those who perpetrate a hate crime; it cannot tell people how to think or how to conduct themselves. We as a Committee struggle with the question: How do we maintain freedom of speech while protecting individual rights? We struggle to draw the line between keeping one's opinions to oneself to avoid offending others, and supporting a person's freedom of speech and expression. There is a point where freedom of speech goes too far and the government cannot legally control people to keep them from committing hate crimes. So where do we draw the line? The State of Maine has tried to compensate for the lack of follow through at the federal level for the prosecution of hate crimes. The government can only enforce the law while it is the individual's job to follow the law. However, we, the Committee on Diversity, believe stricter punishments for prejudice and hate crimes would better encourage individuals to uphold the civil rights of their fellow neighbors.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is a frequent topic of discussion in schools and in the workplace. Sometimes these discussions support and encourage sexual diversity. However, often the message sent is that homosexuality is a horrible concept that should not be embraced. Many people in the world have different views on homosexuality that need to be respected and understood. Some are positive, some are negative, and some are ambivalent. However, Maine youth need to become more open to sexual diversity.

Acceptance of sexual orientation is growing as the cultural diversity of Maine increases. One of the main reasons that sexual diversity has not yet been accepted more fully by society is because many people do not know anyone who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The United States is known to be the **A**Land of the Free,[@] but there is not much freedom if Vermont is the only state that recognizes homosexual relations in the form of marriage. Marriage is a very wonderful moment that all couples, regardless of sexuality, should have the right to embrace. Many cities in Maine, such as Portland, acknowledge domestic partnership. According to MaineToday.com, Portland has the tenth highest population of same sex male couples and the third highest population of same sex female couples, clearly showing that the State of Maine is a place where homosexuals do feel comfortable. With that said, there is still room for improvement.

Couples in homosexual relationships are not given the same rights and opportunities as those in heterosexual partnerships. Homosexuality is not illegal, but in the eyes of millions it is taboo. Homosexuality needs to be embraced by society so that people no longer have to be afraid to declare their sexual orientation.

Many public schools in our state offer unique programs that encourage the acceptance of sexuality. There are pros and cons that follow these programs. On the one hand these programs provide a safe atmosphere that allows individuals to express their feelings freely. Outreach programs help to diminish homophobia and prejudice. On the other hand, they also give the bullies a target. The bullies will find out who is involved with the program one way or another and will taunt them because of it. By limiting participation in such groups, this ensures further segregation through ignorance.

Leaders of the community can do several things to encourage understanding of sexual diversity.

Some suggestions are:

- ❖ Allow gay, lesbian, or bisexual speakers to give presentations that educate the community about sexual diversity
- ❖ Promote education about sexual orientation throughout Maine schools – start with the teachers and then educate the students
- ❖ Create a safe and comfortable environment for all students at school (as mandated by the Core Principles in *Promising Futures*).

STATEMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

We, the Committee on Education, believe that Maine youth deserve a quality education and the opportunity to pursue post-secondary options, but face numerous obstacles due to flaws in our educational system. Many of the school systems in Maine must contend with a lack of adequate funding, which impacts existing programs, especially ELL; teacher's salaries; and the quality of courses and curriculum. The State of Maine and the Department of Education must strengthen, support, and make education the number one priority so that the youth of Maine can have a better future.

A teacher's primary obligation must be to challenge a student to the best of his or her ability: all students who graduate from high school must be equipped with the skills to succeed, either in college or a chosen vocation. Each student must meet his or her individual potential. A teacher must recognize each student's unique learning style, create suitable goals for the youth to achieve, and encourage each student to attain these goals. We also recognize that each student must stay engaged in his or her education.

In some schools, students are discouraged by teachers who do not appear interested in students. Many teachers bring their own personal problems and prejudices into the classroom. Teachers may pass or fail students because of personal reasons, which should not be allowed under any circumstances. Teachers should be held accountable for building bonds with students, and students should share in that responsibility.

In Maine, with its high percentage of Caucasian residents (about 95%), diversity is very low. However, many schools in Maine continue to hire foreign teachers who are not qualified to teach because they value faculty diversity over qualifications. Every teacher should and must be fully qualified as an educator. A school should not hire a foreign teacher just because he or she speaks a particular language or because it will increase staff diversity. In addition, foreign teachers should not teach ELL students who speak the same languages because "the blind cannot lead the blind."

The Economics of Education

We are concerned about the lack of funds for school budgets statewide. This budget crisis impacts students, teachers, and the administration of Maine schools. Teachers across Maine are severely underpaid (Maine ranks forty-eighth in the nation among starting salaries for teachers and thirty-eighth for average veteran teacher salaries). We must acknowledge that low teacher salaries are one of the biggest problems in the educational system. In addition few young people, especially in Maine are becoming teachers. According to the Portland Press Herald, forty-five percent of Maine teachers are over the age of forty-five. As teachers get older, some lose touch with the students, can become disillusioned with teaching, and have a hard time adapting to changes in education and technology.

Our Committee wishes to address this in several ways. We believe that an increase in pay would not only attract Maine students to the field of teaching, but may also help attract a diversified and qualified teaching force from outside the state. Also, we believe the ability of teachers to live an easier life would increase effectiveness in schools, which would in turn create a better atmosphere for learning.

We also believe that the state funding formula for education is unfair since it does not recognize recent demographic changes in Maine, particularly in Portland and Lewiston. According to FairUS.org, about one hundred-forty thousand immigrants were living in Maine as of the 2000 census. Many of these individuals have been resettled or have voluntarily moved to Portland and Lewiston. Due to the limited English proficiency of immigrants and refugees coming to Maine, ELL programs have increased dramatically. When promised federal funding does not come through, the local governments are forced to pay. The sprawl from Portland and Lewiston into suburbs takes kids away from the bigger city and moves them to smaller schools. When families move to the suburbs it hurts the student growth rate in Portland. All of this creates funding deficits in Portland and Lewiston. Our committee suggests that the state help fund ELL programs if the federal government refuses to provide funding in a timely fashion. We also suggest that the state should research an improved formula and increase the funding pool to help out localities that are seriously short on funds.

Courses and Curriculum

As Maine becomes more and more diverse, every Mainer must be exposed to different cultures and languages, especially those which are now represented in our population. We believe that one way to do this is to enrich and diversify what is taught in our schools in order to expose students to new cultures and ideas. We feel that history courses, especially American history, must be adjusted to accurately represent the past, in particular, the contributions of minority groups. In Portland, students have learned American and European History from sixth grade all the way through high school. We, the Committee on Education, find it important to distinguish propaganda from concrete education. Many times we feel that our teachers are rendering bias as a fact. The history curriculum and textbooks do not respect or acknowledge the cultural diversity that makes up the fabric of the United States. We feel that our education must be less Western-focused and celebrate the beauty of all cultures not just Euro-American culture. Immigrants form the backbone that makes the U.S. a strong country. Consequently, the American educational system must acknowledge their contributions in its courses. In order for the youth of America to grow up without prejudice and discrimination against minorities, our history classes must honor diversity and difference by giving minority history and culture equal attention in the classroom. Maine youth shall only move forward when our past is accurately taught to us. We believe the mistakes of the past will direct us to a better future.

When history is taught in a prejudiced way, it promotes and prolongs the cycle of misunderstanding and prejudgment. If we are hoping for equality and tolerance throughout the world, country, and/or state students should have the opportunities to learn the history of other nations, and the history of the U.S. through the eyes of other nations.

Foreign Language

The United States, and Maine in particular, is at a cross-road in terms of language learning. Americans look selfish because we expect everyone in the world to learn our language but do not take the time or expend the energy to learn even our closest neighbors' languages. Our Committee suggests that Maine become a trend-setting state. We propose that Maine require language courses from the beginning of elementary school, and continue them every year in both French and Spanish, the languages of our closest neighbors (Mexico and Canada) and the cultures with which

Mainers most closely identify (French was one of the most commonly identified ancestries in Maine in the 2000 census). This plan would help Maine connect with business partners all over the world as well as preserve the cultural heritage of Maine's Franco-American population.

English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education

ELL classes are meant to teach immigrant and refugee students English. Therefore, ELL students should only be in ELL classes for language learning and should take other courses such as math and science with native English-speaking students. In this way, ELL students would be exposed to speaking English more frequently, because they would have to communicate with other English-speaking students in the class. The more English they speak with other English-speaking students, the faster they will be able to learn the language. We, the Committee on Education, feel that separating ELL students and placing them in ELL classes at all times will not help the students learn English faster.

Segregation of immigrant students adversely impacts the general student body as well. At Portland High School, a school with roughly 1090 students, 355 language minority students, and over 40 languages spoken, students separate into an upper cafeteria with mostly immigrants and a lower cafeteria with Caucasian students. Separated by languages, young people are taught to exclude those who are different from them and often become enemies.

We also recognize that the parents of immigrant and refugee youth must be educated appropriately in order to insure that ELL students are supported at home as well. Minority elders have a difficult time learning English and should attend ELL classes developed for adult language learners. Minority elders and parents must be educated about America institutional, social, and cultural norms so that they can adapt easily to their new environment. They should also be educated about their civil liberties and their children's education so that cultural adaptation can be easily accomplished without frustration. Many immigrant elders find themselves faced with unfamiliar policies in their Maine communities. Due to a lack of knowledge about American policies, many immigrants are mistreated. For example, hospitals face difficulties providing appropriate healthcare to immigrant patients because they do not understand the patient's language and cannot acquire a medical history. We, the Committee on Education, have recalled many disturbing experiences that have compelled us to address the matter of adult education in our state. We also believe that more

programs are needed to educate both native- and foreign-born individuals about each other's cultures so we can learn to accept difference.

We, the Committee on Education, believe that students who need special education should have the same equality and opportunity as any other students. According to the Maine Law of Special Education, the Maine Department of Education should play a part in making sure that all local schools and the state follow the rules that comply to IDEA (Individuals with Disability Education Act). IDEA includes qualification of the student specific type of disability (reading comprehension, speech and language impairment etc.) evaluating a student in order to identify his/her special needs, and provide the service that is provided for the student need. Physically and/or mentally challenge students cannot be left at the bottom of the stairs of education.

Graduation

The State of Maine is listed nationally as having one of the lowest high school dropout rates in the nation. However, in the 2001-2002 school year, about two thousand students did not graduate from public high schools; this has to be more of an indictment on the nation as a whole than an honor for our state. Our Committee praises Maine school systems for graduating so many youth (in 2001-2002, about 62,000 according to unitedhealthfoundation.org). But we also contend that no person is less valuable than another and no child can be left behind. About 1 in 31 students in any given class will drop out in any given year from public school (www.Maine.gov). When compared to the average of dropouts in Maine private schools (1 in about 90 according to Maine.gov), we can see why more and more of Maine's youth reach out for the intimacy and the freedom of private schooling. We suggest that the State of Maine address this issue by embracing the private school philosophy of allowing teachers more freedom in learning, teaching, and building relationships with their students. Our Committee believes that Maine's youth need to be more connected to their teachers.

With regard to curriculum and graduation requirements, we see a fatal flaw in the procedure. Public school teachers are rushed at the end of the year to meet the standards of the Maine Learning Results, leaving many students discouraged and buried by the wave of work that comes after April vacation. The frustration faced by students can lead to burn-out and a disinterest in acquiring the skills and knowledge to graduate. Too many times have we seen teachers passing

students who clearly are not capable of completing school at a successful level. This disconnection between requirements and student ability causes schools to fail, and allows students to finish their high school careers not equipped with the proper education but only with a diploma.

When Maine students leave high school with their diplomas, many attend local universities, such as the University of Maine, for higher education. To prove that our education system has failed the last generation we only need to look at the graduation rate of students who entered the University of Maine system in 1995-1996. Only 54 percent of incoming students in 1995 achieved a degree within 6 years, according to www.Maine.edu. We believe that the failure to educate Maine youth at the secondary and post-secondary levels cannot be continued. Universities and colleges are becoming increasingly expensive, a potential disincentive to even attending such institutions. Our Committee suggests that the Department of Education set up an enquiry committee to look into why so few students graduate from our state universities.

We, the Committee on Education, find it is important for the Department of Education and the government of the State of Maine to acknowledge that education is a primary priority so that the children of Maine will have promising futures. The youth of Maine are tomorrow's leaders; our educational system must play an important part in their life.

STATEMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMICS

At the moment, Maine has the lowest birthrate since 1892 and is the fourth oldest state in the country in terms of the age of its population. Steps must be taken to keep the youth of Maine in the state and to attract new young residents from out-of-state. In addition, economic disparity is a large problem in the state and is reflected in a poor public housing and welfare system.

As the youth of Maine leave our state, the average age of the population continues to increase. Better opportunities are needed to encourage our youth to remain in the state and incentives must be added to attract others to move here. Measures must be taken to facilitate economic growth and to increase the employment opportunities for Maine youth.

Public housing problems adversely impact Maine's economy, and also leave many of its residents feeling isolated from society. Within public housing we see a continuous cycle of poverty and complacency that makes it very hard for people of lower socioeconomic status class to move up and become active contributors in our society.

Finally, welfare is meant to be a program to help people get back on their feet to become independent and self-sufficient. However, overtime, many have taken advantage of the program and learned to make welfare a way of life rather than a temporary means of economic and social recovery.

Economic Incentives to Live in Maine

It has become increasingly apparent that Maine is not growing as it should be. The state is aging as our youth are leaving in search of better opportunities. From 1990 to 2000 the number of people in our youngest age bracket dropped from 85,000 to 70,000. An aging population also increases the need for Medicaid programs and assisted living, further draining state's financial resources. These problems must be addressed if Maine is to grow.

Incentives are needed to keep Maine youth in the state for college, to persuade the youth of Maine who have left the state to return home, and to attract others from out-of-state to move here.

Below are some recommendations to do so:

- ❖ Increasing the number and amount of scholarships available to Maine youth to attend Maine colleges would help to keep youth in the state. Programs like the Mitchell Fund have been helping to do so, but more are needed.
- ❖ Maine is also one of the highest taxed states in the country. As a result, many people are leaving the state in search of relief from the heavy burden. Our state needs to address this situation.
- ❖ Finally, after the incident in Lewiston involving Somali immigrants and native born residents, many businesses threatened not to operate in the state or to relocate here if Maine and its residents did not open themselves to diversity. Our state needs to acknowledge that a diverse population may in fact attract more businesses. More businesses mean better opportunities, more revenue, and more growth for the state.

The youth of Maine are faced with the decision to leave Maine for better opportunities or to pursue the available options here in our state. Currently, the options here are not attractive to many young people. By increasing the amount of available opportunities to the youth it will help ensure a strong future for our state.

Public Housing

A sense of pride and dignity must be restored to the residents of public housing establishments. The lack of upkeep within these areas has damaged the sense of self-confidence among the tenants, lowered the quality of life, and segregated and isolated them from the rest of society.

If a person loses his or her pride and dignity, then the hope and desire for a better life and future has been lost. The better the sense of self worth a person has, the more likely it is that they will work to be self-sufficient. Being segregated from the rest of society, the residents of public housing projects have been marked as outsiders. This leads to widespread feeling of “not being wanted.” Every person deserves to feel like a member of society.

“Scattered site housing projects”, which are being experimented with across the country and in Maine, are a possible solution to Portland’s housing problems. In scattered site housing projects, residents will achieve the sense of pride and self-worth to achieve successful and productive lives. In addition they will be more likely to take care of what they have if they have a stake in their property and are better integrated in the community. Increased upkeep of public housing units will help to bring down vandalism and crime. Safer and better maintained housing projects will give surrounding businesses and neighbors less of a reason to leave the area and less of a reason to

criticize public housing, enhancing social integration across economic classes.

Welfare

Ideally, welfare is a program to provide temporary assistance to people in need. Its goal is to enable participants to eventually be self-sufficient in order to take care of themselves without relying on the government. Unfortunately, rather than being used as a stepping stone to a better life, welfare has become a way of life for many people. Increased enforcement of welfare requirements is needed. Individuals must also be willing to take the initiative to help themselves by seeking out employment. However, better job opportunities are needed to assist them in this process.

The use of welfare has become a prominent issue in the state. As residents of Portland, we have seen the same abuse within our communities. The State of Maine must better ensure that allocated money is spent on basic necessities. This is important when reducing welfare abuse but also in breaking the cycle of parents passing down these abusive values to their children.

There are many people on welfare earnestly searching for jobs in Maine, but despite their efforts, the lack of training and available jobs put them at a severe disadvantage. Job creation should be a statewide priority. If the jobs have better pay and benefits, people on welfare will be able to support their family to the point where they are able to free themselves from public assistance. In addition, new jobs and existing jobs must better provide for their employees.

The goal for any person on welfare must be to become independent from government assistance. Increased educational opportunities and on-the-job training must be made available for welfare recipients in order to achieve this goal.

STATEMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE MEDIA

The content of the media potentially shapes the thoughts and ideas of society, spreads information, and increases understanding and tolerance when presented properly. However, the media can also act as a divisive instrument that produces conflict and spreads hate in Maine.

The majority of the media is profit-oriented and aimed at attracting consumers rather than providing factual reports of the news. Problems arise when visual or print media depict violence as entertainment and sensationalized stories. For example, the arsenic poisoning incident in northern Maine has been transformed into a murder mystery that seemed to be pulled from the popular television show “CSI”. The incident in Lewiston with the Somali community has been reported as a huge problem when it was really a smaller-scale issue. The media cannot serve as just a source of entertainment; it must also spread knowledge and increase awareness.

Journalism, at its best, is objective and impartial on all issues. The *Boston Globe* article about the recent Somali influx negatively depicted Lewiston, its residents, and the Somali population. Rather than present how Lewiston has taken steps towards increasing tolerance, the journalist chose to focus on the negative aspects of the situation. The opening line to the *Boston Globe* article from July of 2002 reads: AJust down scruffy Lisbon Street from Frenchy's Barber Shop, behind threadbare sheets that serve as drooping curtains, a tired city's newest immigrants gather in their dilapidated house of worship.@

The article fails to portray both the admirable and negative aspects of the situation and hence is biased in its presentation. This type of representation negatively impacts the ideal that many Mainers uphold about our state: “life the way it should be.”

Image of Maine

We believe that the national media negatively portrays Maine and its people. The image of Maine needs to be improved in order to bring in more businesses, increase tourism, to encourage youth to attend local colleges, and to increase the diversity of our population. At the moment, the media portrays stereotypes that present Maine and its people in an unfavorable manner. These negative

perceptions of Maine potentially influence the decisions of people and businesses relocating to Maine.

Our committee researched various media outlets in an attempt to define the image of Maine from the perspective of people from out-of-state. Print, visual, and written sources all painted pictures of Maine as full of Aignorant hillbillies unopen to change and diversity.@

We suggest the following recommendations to address the image of Maine:

- ❖ The Board of Tourism must to take a pro-active role in promoting our state to help create a more accurate and positive image of Maine and its people within the media. The image of Maine must reflect the values, resources, and attitude of its people. This portrayal must also acknowledge the state=s effort to increase tolerance.
- ❖ To draw more business and generate positive publicity the state must build a more expansive, modern civic center to attract events such as concerts, sporting events, and national conventions. These efforts could improve the desirability of Maine as a place to visit and live.