

Dear Readers,

While it may be blatantly cliché to say so, summer passes quickly in Maine. We bring you our summer issue at the start of a new school year when the snap of fall has only begun.

Unfortunately, for many, the change in weather signifies a tightening of the belts as gardens wither and thermostats are turned up at night. The cost of living in Maine is high, and this change of season is not welcome by many of our most vulnerable citizens.

In this issue we begin with an update on the persistent face of poverty in Maine. In contrast to oft-held stereotypes of who is poor, Maine has a higher rate of working poor than in the nation as a whole. How do we return money to the pockets of those who work hard for little pay? One solution is to expand Maine's Earned Income Tax Credit. We explore this issue in a subsequent article.

Our working poor are also least likely to have access to affordable health care. Within Maine, as in other states, expanding access to timely and affordable health care is a vital key to reducing poverty. But how do we achieve this without exploding the state budget? Many states, including Maine, have sought to leverage their Medicaid systems to serve additional populations. Some argue that such expansions are unsustainable and likely to lead to insurmountable state budget crises. In this issue we give readers an overview of how MaineCare, our state's Medicaid program, works and what types of reforms states are experimenting with in order to address the twin issues of access and cost. We follow with two different viewpoints on how Maine should proceed.

On the other hand, there is no debate over the importance of education and well-paying jobs in lifting individuals out of poverty. But, first, how do we measure what students in our public education system are learning and capable of doing? Our fourth article looks retrospectively at why Maine's local assessment system failed and, ultimately, was repealed. Our final article examines the state's role in strengthening, promoting, and sustaining Maine's nature-based tourism industry. Conventional wisdom argues that tourism—Maine's largest industry—produces largely low-paying jobs. Not necessarily so, argue the authors of our last article. High-quality tourism experiences are associated with well-paying jobs, and Maine does far too little to help communities and to regions develop such experiences.

So, as you put on that extra sweater this fall, we encourage you to read this issue. Our next issue will be devoted to land use and rural development issues in Maine's North Woods. Stay tuned and stay warm.

Best


