

## Remarks to MDF Leadership Unplugged

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Tony Cipollone, President and CEO

John T. Gorman Foundation

Thanks so much Cheryl, for that nice introduction. Good morning. It's great to be here and let say that I am stunned by the number of people you can get to come to a 7:30 a.m. meeting simply by offering them breakfast. I want to echo Cheryl's thanks to the Bangor Savings Bank and L.L. Bean for sponsoring and hosting this morning's event.

As Cheryl said, I've now been in Maine 3 years, and though I'll never be considered a Mainer, I have to tell you that it's great to finally be at the point where I can walk into a room and actually recognize people I've met before. It's terrific to see some of our grantees here this morning; as well as some of our partners and colleagues from other foundations as well. I'm particularly pleased that Wes Bonney has joined us this morning. Wes, besides being one of the nicest and most accomplished people you'll ever meet is one of the founding members of the John T. Gorman Foundation Board and, in addition, he's a founding member of the Maine Development Foundation and I know he's got to be pleased and proud to see how much MDF has grown and accomplished over the years.

I have to admit that when I got this invitation from Harold and Cheryl, I was a little apprehensive because they said they billed this event as a conversation. So I asked how many people they typically get and they said anywhere from 80 – 100 --- and this gave me some further pause. I've given lots of speeches and interviews and have been on all kinds of panels over the years, but I must say I've never tried to have a "conversation" with this many people. As my staff and spouse can quickly attest, I have enough trouble having a conversation with one person let alone this many.

But I'll try. While I'm clearly capable of droning on from now until 9:00, what I hope to do is limit my remarks to about 25 minutes or so (or about the amount of time it will take for everyone's coffee to kick in), try to hold up my end of this conversation and then hand it over to you guys and, as is the case in most conversations that I have, you can tell me why I'm wrong; or ask questions; or hopefully, give me better ideas than the ones I'm likely to touch on this morning.

So let me begin by telling you a little bit about the John T. Gorman Foundation, the values that drive us and some of the things that have increasingly characterized the way we've pursued our work over the last couple of years.

We are a Maine-focused private philanthropy, based in Portland, and we're focused on improving the lives of disadvantaged folks in our state. John T. Gorman --- who everyone called Tom --- was a grandson of L.L. Bean and he established the foundation in 1995 as a way of honoring his parents and giving back to the community and the state that he loved. Tom recognized that his success in life was rooted in the support he received from his family and community and his interest was in helping those who didn't have the extraordinary supports and opportunities that he enjoyed. Tom was an extremely modest person and for 15 years, the Foundation was known as the JTG Foundation because he didn't want to draw attention to himself. Over that time period, JTG distributed about one million dollars annually, usually through modest-sized grants in areas that were of interest to Tom --- often, but not exclusively, in the areas of mental health and cancer treatment. The foundation was administered through Brann and Isaacson, a law firm in Lewiston, and over the years it developed a solid reputation as a philanthropy that focused on direct services and a foundation that didn't shy away from providing operating support to non-profits when that was necessary.

In 2010, Tom Gorman passed away and generously left the bulk of his estate to the Foundation. As a result, the foundation grew to about nine times its original endowment.

With Tom's passing, the Board, a wonderful group of folks, made a series of critical decisions. First, they changed our name to the John T. Gorman Foundation so as to better and more directly honor Tom. Second, they decided to establish offices, in Portland, and hire staff to run the Foundation; and third, and most importantly, they began to discuss whether the foundation, in its then current iteration, was doing all that it could to make a difference in Maine. Their desire was that the foundation would become more thoughtful, purposeful and strategic in its grantmaking, focusing more on root problems that underlie so many of the challenges facing disadvantaged folks in Maine. They thought that I might be able to help them do that and three years ago I was honored to be asked to become the foundation's first president and CEO.

After a whirlwind couple of years that saw us establish an office, build a new grant making infrastructure, hire staff and work with the board to sharpen our mission and create a strategic plan, I'm proud to say that today, our mission is to advance ideas and opportunities that can improve the lives of disadvantaged people in our state. By virtue of lots of research, data analysis and, quite frankly, hundreds of conversations had in the course of visiting every county in Maine, we chose to focus our work on four priorities:

Helping our youngest children succeed in school;

Helping vulnerable older youth become thriving adults;

Helping struggling parents better provide and care for their families; and

Helping more low-income seniors age in place

While each of these are distinct priority issues, the reality is that because they represent key transition points in life, they are each intimately connected. We know, for example, that:

- It's our disadvantaged families who experience disproportionate challenges and stressors that often make it extremely tough to help adequately prepare their young children to succeed in school; and they're also likely to have the toughest time caring for the aging parent who needs their support in order to remain at home.
- We know that poor children who do not succeed academically by age 8 are far more likely to fail in their later years --- and far more likely to become that older youth who will struggle to become a successful independent adult.
- And we know that poor, struggling older youth who don't get the opportunities to successfully connect to education and employment, are far too likely to become a new generation of parents without the prospects and resources to adequately provide and care for a new generation of kids.

At the core of who we are at the John T. Gorman Foundation is an aspiration to do all that we can, in partnership with others, to advance supports and opportunities that can intervene in what too often has become a continuous loop of lousy outcomes that disproportionately plague far too many of our disadvantaged and most vulnerable Mainers --- a goal that is, in our view, one of the most important things that we can pursue.

Why is leveling the playing field for our most vulnerable so important? Consider, for example, that:

- Our poorest children disproportionately fail to reach critical milestones such as 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency and that they're four times more likely to drop out. In Maine there's almost 18 percent graduation gap between students who are eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch and those who are not (75.7% vs 93.3%).
- Poor older youth are far more likely to be homeless and to have had experience in the foster care and juvenile justice systems; and are far less likely to complete any post-high school credential. In some of our most challenged Maine counties, the number of youth ages 16-24 who are neither in school nor working is as high as 19 percent.

- We know that our low-income parents have the toughest time connecting to jobs that provide advancement, adequate incomes and key benefits that impact their ability to successfully provide for their families. Of the almost 150,000 working families in Maine -- families that rely on salary or wages to meet their household expenses --- more than a quarter have incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and about 9,000 of them are living in poverty despite the fact that they're employed – making it far more challenging to meet basic needs and build savings and assets that can help tide them over in tough times.
- And we know that among our seniors, those with the lowest incomes struggle the most. In Maine, 44% of our seniors are living below 200 percent of the FPL --- 10 percent higher than the rest of the state; and more than 12 percent are living below the federal poverty level. The largest concentrations are in our rural areas, which bring particular and significant challenges related to housing, health, transportation and overall social isolation.

To us, these statistics – and the scores of others I could have cited – are neither acceptable nor inevitable. And they clearly speak to what is, in our view, a critical opportunity gap for our poorest Mainers. It's a gap that's visible and unacceptable in many ways.

There's no reason why a child born today to a young, low-income single mom in Machias ought not have the same opportunities to succeed as a child born into a Falmouth family; there's no reason why an 18 year old transitioning from foster care ought not have the same opportunity to be mentored and supported through college and into the workforce as my child or yours; there's no reason why parents working two and sometimes three jobs ought not have the opportunity to gain enough economic traction to avoid having to make critical choices between child care and car repair.

If Maine is to thrive economically in the years ahead; if we're to maintain the vibrancy, the stability and the social fabric of our communities --- then we believe that trying to level the playing field --- and trying to close this opportunity gap for those most at-risk is one of the most important things that we can do.

When push comes to shove, addressing this opportunity gap is really at the core of why Tom Gorman established our foundation; and to honor him and be true to his wishes, our charge is to pursue this work in the most thoughtful and strategic way that we can.

So how do we do that? Let me spend a few minutes highlighting 3-4 things that I think characterize our work and along the way I'll try to provide some examples to illustrate.

## Data and Results

One thing that characterizes our work is that we pay a lot of attention to data. It's kind of a big deal to us because it helps us do two things --- 1) identify and measure results; and 2) target our investments.

In terms of results and measuring impact, we try to focus less on "outputs" --- for example, the numbers of people served or rates of enrollment in something. Is this important and do we measure this when it's appropriate? Absolutely. But the results we're really interested in are those that answer the question: is anybody better off as a result of what we funded and what our grantee did? Did it actually make a difference for people? Are people in job training programs employed and earning more a year out? Are kids in literacy programs reading better? Are youth being mentored graduating at higher rates? Are rates of senior financial abuse declining due to outreach and education efforts we support? These are the kind of results that tell us whether we're moving from simply doing good to making a difference.

At the John T. Gorman Foundation, we use a particular framework and tool to help us and our grantees do this, called Results Based Accountability, or RBA, which we think offers a common sense approach that helps folks identify results, use data to examine historical trends and then develop strategies to change the direction of trend lines over time. It's a framework that we used in the development of our strategic plan. It's a framework that has driven much of our internal work at the foundation and one that we promote in the context of some of our highest priority grantees and initiatives. We think it works well. There's not a lot of mumbo jumbo to it; and at its core, it's much like the approach used by any successful organization.

In addition to using data to help us identify results and measure progress, we also use data to enable us to target our investments more productively. Using data --- or more specifically, using disaggregated data --- allows us to target our investments in ways that are likely to make the biggest difference. Disaggregated data allows us to strategically invest our dollars in places and people that disproportionately influence the results that we hope to achieve.

So if, for example, we want to improve reading proficiency by the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (one of MDF's Measures of Growth), disaggregated data should help us identify and support communities in Maine that fare the worst on this measure. Similarly, if we believe that post-secondary completion is an important contributor to successful adult transition among high-risk youth, then disaggregated data can help us identify, for example, those high schools and community colleges that are having the toughest time helping their students persist and succeed. And if we believe that job attachment is critical to helping low-income families improve their economic security, then we ought to be looking at places and sub-populations -- for example, single mom's or New American's who, based on data, are shown to be

disproportionately driving unemployment or underemployment trends. We can't do that and we can't focus on results without making disaggregated data analysis a critical part of our work.

### Think Comprehensively about Prioritize Comprehensive Ideas

Now data and results and targeting are critically important, but they're not everything. We know that to make a difference, we also need good ideas and interventions. And given what we're trying to achieve, we have increasingly put a premium on ideas and interventions that are comprehensive in their scope and delivery.

We do this because, put simply, we have a fundamental belief that complicated issues --- more often than not --- don't lend themselves to simple solutions. We think that the journalist and social critic H.L. Mencken was probably on to something when he said, "For every complicated issue there is usually a solution that is clear, simple and (usually) wrong."

Ask any child care worker, teacher, counselor, social worker or employment specialist and they will give you an eloquent earful about the range of interconnected educational, emotional and economic challenges facing folks they're trying to help. Yet, despite this, our typical tendency is to pursue single-dimension solutions for multi-issue problems; and too often such solutions are insufficiently powerful to overcome the complexities of the problems faced by our most challenged kids, youth and adults.

Many times, because of funding streams and funding opportunities, we wind up tackling problems in ways that are too siloed, too restrictive, and sometimes, simply out-of-touch with reality.

We believe that we need to challenge ourselves – we need to challenge ourselves to think about new ways of working with others so that we can, in a more efficient and effective way, address not just the one, but the multiple issues that many folks in need may be grappling with.

Increasingly, our approach is to look for opportunities where we can get multiple organizations, programs or systems to work together to better combine, coordinate and more effectively bundle and deliver important opportunities and supports.

Some examples:

- One example is a recent multi-year investment we made to the University of Maine's Center for Women, Work and Community, so that they can partner with the statewide CA\$H Coalition and provide a more comprehensive array of financial literacy, savings and asset building opportunities for folks who are accessing the EITC (which is, by the way, our nation's most effective strategy for combating child poverty) and other tax credits through the CA\$H Coalition's free tax prep services.

- Another example is a grant we made to Preble Street, to work with a range of partners to provide a comprehensive array of housing, educational, mental health, social and other supports to youth transitioning from their Joe Kreisler Teen Shelter to independent living.
- Also related to transitioning youth, we're supporting and participating in a significant effort led by the Southern Maine Youth Transitions Collaborative. It involves a range of service providers and systems working together to develop an array of well-coordinated opportunities and supports to help young people moving from the foster care and juvenile justice systems to improve their education and employment prospects and experiences. This work is part of a 21 city national effort being advanced by the Aspen Institute.

Now while more comprehensive (and, by their nature, collaborative) interventions can, we think, better help address the multiple needs that so many folks demonstrate, such efforts they have other benefits as well.

Comprehensive programs better enable us to address the needs of families as a unit and --- importantly --- they help us develop efforts that can cut across generations. This is really important because far too often we don't just silo services --- we silo people.

Perhaps the best illustration of this is our typical tendency to address issues facing young children and youth in ways that are totally disconnected from those experienced by their families --- and we do this even though we know that the challenges and hardships that characterize vulnerable children and youth are frequently a function of the challenges and hardships faced by their families. We know, for example, that parents' health and children's health are intimately intertwined; we know that there are significant parallels between the educational experiences and achievement of parents and the academic success of their children; and we know that child poverty can be easily predicted by a parent's employment status, their ability to meet basic needs and their capacity to save and build assets.

The reality is that kids do well when their families do well and our chances of improving the future for our children can be greatly enhanced if we can simultaneously try to improve the present for their parents. We believe we ought to think more comprehensively and find new ways of helping kids directly while also providing parents with the opportunities, tools, resources, relationships and supports that can better assist them in their most fundamental roles as bread-winners, teachers, care givers and role models.

Now what I'm describing here is challenging, but it's certainly not novel. There is a significant and increasingly growing body of research pointing to the powerful potential of using two-generational strategies --- that is, comprehensive strategies that pointedly bundle together and

target opportunities and supports for parents and kids, not simply those who live in the same community, but in the same family.

And we're seeing good on-the-ground examples of these strategies and others --- strategies that embrace rather than ignore the critical inter-relationships between kids and families --- taking root in places across the country (in places like Fargo, Tulsa, Minneapolis and Atlanta). I'm hoping that with the support of our Board that this will be a direction that our foundation will pursue as well over the next few years.

But you know, if we're going to get more comprehensive; if we're going to get more complicated, we think that we have to extend the effort to help grantees move in this direction more effectively. This brings me to a third characteristic of how we try to work, which is to help build the capacity of our grantees and connect them to new ideas.

#### Build Capacity and Expose People to New Ideas

We think that there are lots of terrific things going on in Maine and we have tried to do our best to identify these efforts and to provide them with support. But you know, the results that we and our grantees are trying to advance are tough. The fact is, it's not rocket science -- it's much harder --- because we're all trying to tackle problems that many folks view as intractable; problems that often require new ways of thinking about old issues that have stymied us all for far too long; problems that require new ways of working --- new skills, new strategies, new practices and new paradigms that may not be part of our common repertoires. And we believe that as a foundation, we have a responsibility to help people build these new capacities if they are so inclined.

We have an aspiration at the John T. Gorman Foundation that in the years to come we will be viewed --- by practitioners, policy makers and communities --- as a valuable resource for accessing and connecting to good ideas; for information about cutting-edge solutions being used nationally; and for help in building the capacities they need to succeed.

And over the last three years we have modestly tried to move in this direction. Some examples:

- In Lewiston, where there's a significant problem with elevated blood lead levels among school children, we were able to connect Healthy Androscoggin and others to the National Coalition to Prevent Childhood Lead Poisoning, which provided valuable technical assistance and helped the City of Lewiston secure a \$3.4 million federal grant to address this incredibly important issue which affects kids, families and seniors. There is now a broad-based collaborative in place that recognizes how the quality of housing available to families directly influences the health and achievement of their children.

- With the Samuel L. Cohen Foundation as a partner, we have supported significant technical assistance as well as program and evaluation help to four school districts, Biddeford, Oxford Hills, Lewiston and Portland, so that they can develop efforts aimed at stemming the problem of summer learning loss among low-income kids. This has been part of a three year initiative that supports districts' ability to replicate research-based national best practices to address this important issue which is a serious challenge to grade level reading proficiency. After two years, each district has been able to demonstrate statistically significant improvement and more kids are beginning their school year either on par with or ahead of their peers.
- In Bangor, we helped forge a partnership between the Bangor Housing Authority and Brandeis University so that Bangor could secure the expertise they needed to resurrect and revamp their family self-sufficiency program, which helps public housing residents secure new connections to employment, education and asset development opportunities. Brandeis works with similar programs nationally and provides on-going TA to the folks in Bangor.
- And finally, in our newest and probably our most intensive capacity building venture, we will soon announce the first cohort of the John T. Gorman Fellowship, which is hoping to help leaders in Maine become even stronger change agents by grounding them in Results Based Leadership skills and exposing them to a range of ideas that have had success nationally.

There are other examples that I can use to illustrate, but I think you get the basic point: if we are going to challenge our grantees to identify and achieve results; and if we're going to challenge them to develop more comprehensive (and by their nature, more complicated) solutions, we need to be prepared to help them secure the skills and capacity to do this well.

This is a role that I believe foundations are uniquely poised to play and I would love it if, in the years to come, we have grantees tell us that while the money we granted was important --- even more important was the technical assistance we provided, or the connections to national experts we identified, or the leadership development opportunities we offered, or the trip we organized to meet with folks grappling with similar problems in other cities or states --- and I'm hoping we'll get there in the years to come.

### Policy

Finally, a growing area of our work is and will be related to policy. If we're to ever move from closing the opportunity gap from some to closing it for many, then smart public policy is critical. The reality is that we can have examples of innovative and effective programs operating throughout the state --- but at the end of the day, as my former colleague Patrick McCarthy used to say, bad policy trumps good programs.

So we have a responsibility, we think, to do what we can to help promote smart, common ground policy ideas that make sense for the issues and the people we care about: policies that can advance good results without breaking the bank; and policies with the potential of generating bi-partisan support.

Given this, we will continue to support the work of advocacy groups that are aligned with our mission, values and agenda; and make investments that can help broaden the array of policy ideas that have the potential to advance common objectives. These investments may include evaluations and documentations of programs or initiatives that can provide evidence and insight into new ideas; scans of innovative policies taking place within states that are grappling with similar issues; policy research that can shed light and broaden understanding about challenging problems we face in Maine; and convenings that help create a big tent for many stakeholders to come together, grapple with tough problems and forge ideas that have the potential for broad-based support.

One example of this last approach is the support we provided for last year's series of state roundtables on aging that eventually led to a statewide summit on this issue. That summit was the foundation for the creation of a new blueprint on aging that is providing a number of new policy ideas that we think have the potential to positively address some of the challenges facing Maine's seniors --- and I suspect that we'll do more of exactly this type of work in the years ahead.

### Conclusion

So that's a little bit of a glimpse into the John T. Gorman Foundation and into some of the things that we think about and do. Like everyone in this room, we believe that the work that we do is challenging; but if it's done well, we think it can make a difference.

That said, we're neither so naïve nor arrogant to think that we can accomplish what we aspire to do by ourselves. We need partners, collaborators and co-conspirators. We need a collective approach if we're going to change the world for our most challenged kids, families and communities and I am sincere in my aspiration that the John T. Gorman Foundation be seen as a trusted partner and a resource on this important journey.

In closing, let me say that I've been blessed to have had the opportunity to do work in many states and communities around the country over the last 25 years, and although I have only been here for a short period of time, I have to say that Maine is unique.

Yes, we have challenges that can drive us all crazy. But we have unique advantages as well. Unlike other places, we have a population whose small size enables us to wrap our hands around problems --- we don't have to advance the needle for hundreds of thousands and

sometimes millions of people to make a significant difference for the future of our state. We have a culture of familiarity and partnership; and we have that thick web of relationships that are absolutely essential for successful collaboration and consensus --- it's a culture that few places I've seen can emulate.

In Maine, moving the needle and making a difference is doable. We can improve support and opportunities and I believe we can, if we have the will, close the opportunity gaps and level the playing field for those in Maine who need it most.

Thanks very much for your attention this morning.