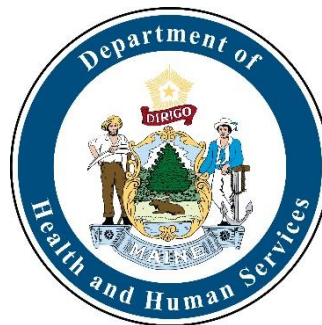


Office for Family Independence (OFI)

Anthony Pelotte, Director

January 2023



Office for Family Independence

The Office for Family Independence assists people in Maine to meet their basic needs while supporting their path to independence and employment.

The Office at a Glance
Permanent Positions: 821
Limited Period Positions: 100

OFI: People We Serve, Services We Provide

- **OFI determines eligibility for three major programs:**
 1. MaineCare (Maine’s Medicaid program)
 2. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly “food supplement”)
 3. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
- **OFI offers several Employment and Training Programs:**
 1. ASPIRE – Additional Support for People in Retraining and Employment
 2. HOPE - Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment & Parents as Scholars (PaS)
 3. SNAP E&T – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training
- **OFI provides oversight and support for the General Assistance program** including partial reimbursement to municipalities, program rules and policy, and auditing
- **OFI assists parents with child support payments through the Division of Support Enforcement and Recovery** by collecting child support payments and disbursing to the custodial parent, locating missing parents and establishing paternity when necessary
- **OFI determines Disability for Social Security applicants** and processes disability claims on behalf of the Federal Social Security Administration.
- **OFI investigates and responds to allegations of benefit fraud**

Accessing Programs

Online Portal for Applications: My Maine Connection - www.mymaineconnection.gov

- My Maine Connection assists people in applying for SNAP, TANF, and MaineCare
- Users can prescreen themselves then develop a profile and fill out an application online.
- Once enrolled, case information and recertification can be accessed

Applicants can also apply by:

Email: Farmington.DHHS@Maine.gov

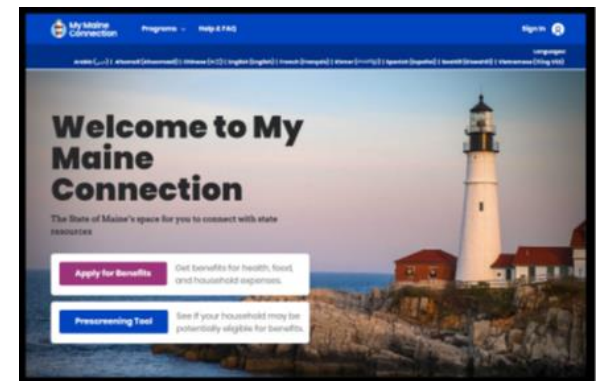
- Mail: Office for Family Independence, 114 Corn Shop Lane, Farmington ME
- Fax: 207-778-8429
- Phone: 1-855-797-4357
- In person at one of our 16 district offices

Child Support Services:

- Online: <https://maine.gov/dhhs/ofi/programs-services/child-support-services>
- Mail: Division of Support Enforcement & Recovery, 109 Capitol St. Augusta ME
- Phone: 1-800-371-7179
- Customer Portal: <https://gateway.maine.gov/DHHS/m-cportal>

Online Services: My Maine Connection Replacement

- In July 2022, OFI significantly upgraded the online services platform with a new program and website – www.MyMaineConnection.gov
- New features include:
 - A mobile-friendly platform
 - An ability to upload documents directly
 - Streamlined, dynamic question-flow
 - Sophisticated integration with ACES and pre-populated data for client already in OFI systems
- In five months following launch:
 - 63k new accounts were created
 - Clients submitted 18k applications
 - Clients submitted 14k recertifications
 - Clients uploaded 38k documents



OFI: Client Service Activity

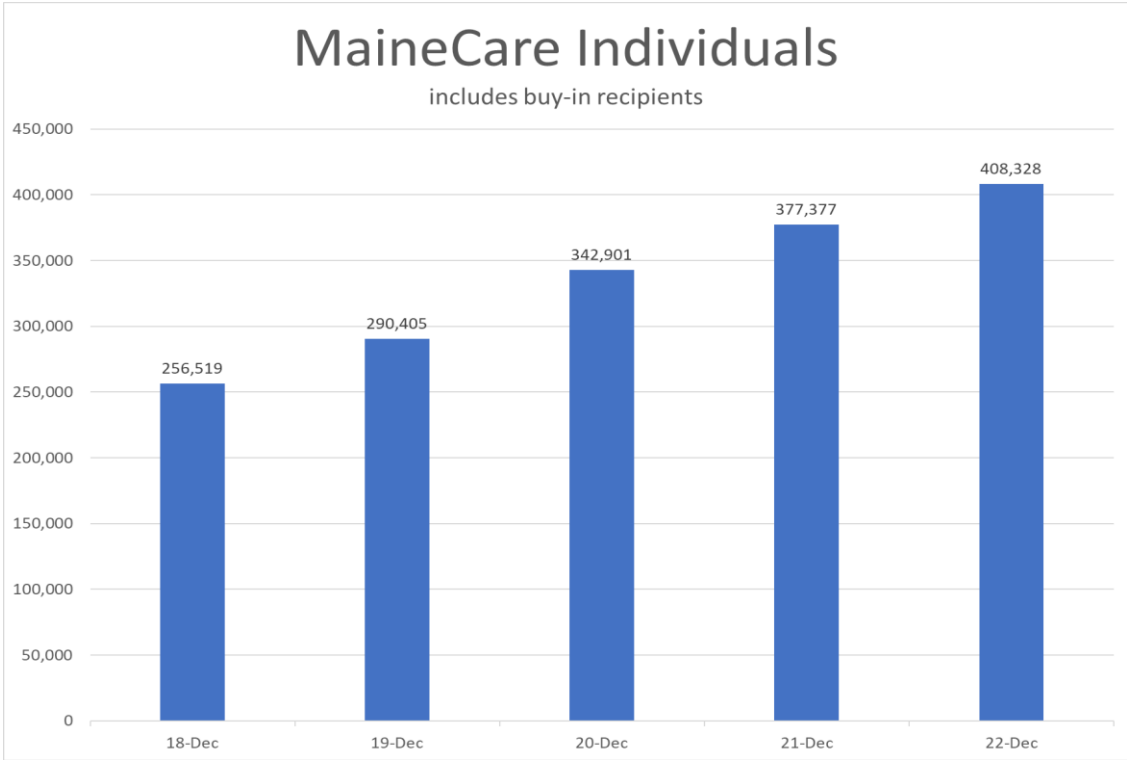
Function	Description	Results
Statewide Phone Queue	A virtual call center environment handles most incoming OFI calls and technology automates some client transactions and allows real-time tracking and monitoring of calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Approximately 430,000 calls come into the queue annually. ✓ Staffing averages 60 Eligibility Workers and 32 triage staff daily.
Statewide Document Imaging	Mail is routed through a central processing center where it is scanned and indexed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Scans and indexes an average of 37,000 client documents monthly.
Siebel Workflow Management	Allows for the statewide distribution of applications and reviews, as well as real-time tracking of cases, staff performance, and dashboards/management reporting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Approximately 110,000 applications and 150,000 recertifications received per year can be prioritized and tracked.
Online Services	My Maine Connection provides a streamlined, web-based platform for clients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Approximately 42k My Maine Connection client submissions (apps, reviews, SNAP six-month reports, changes) received since July 2022.

Eligibility for MaineCare, SNAP, and TANF



OFI: MaineCare

Eligibility Specialists determine eligibility for nearly all groups and services including but not limited to: parents, children, nursing homes, residential care, Medicaid disability, Medicare Savings Program and CHIP. All financial eligibility is determined by OFI.



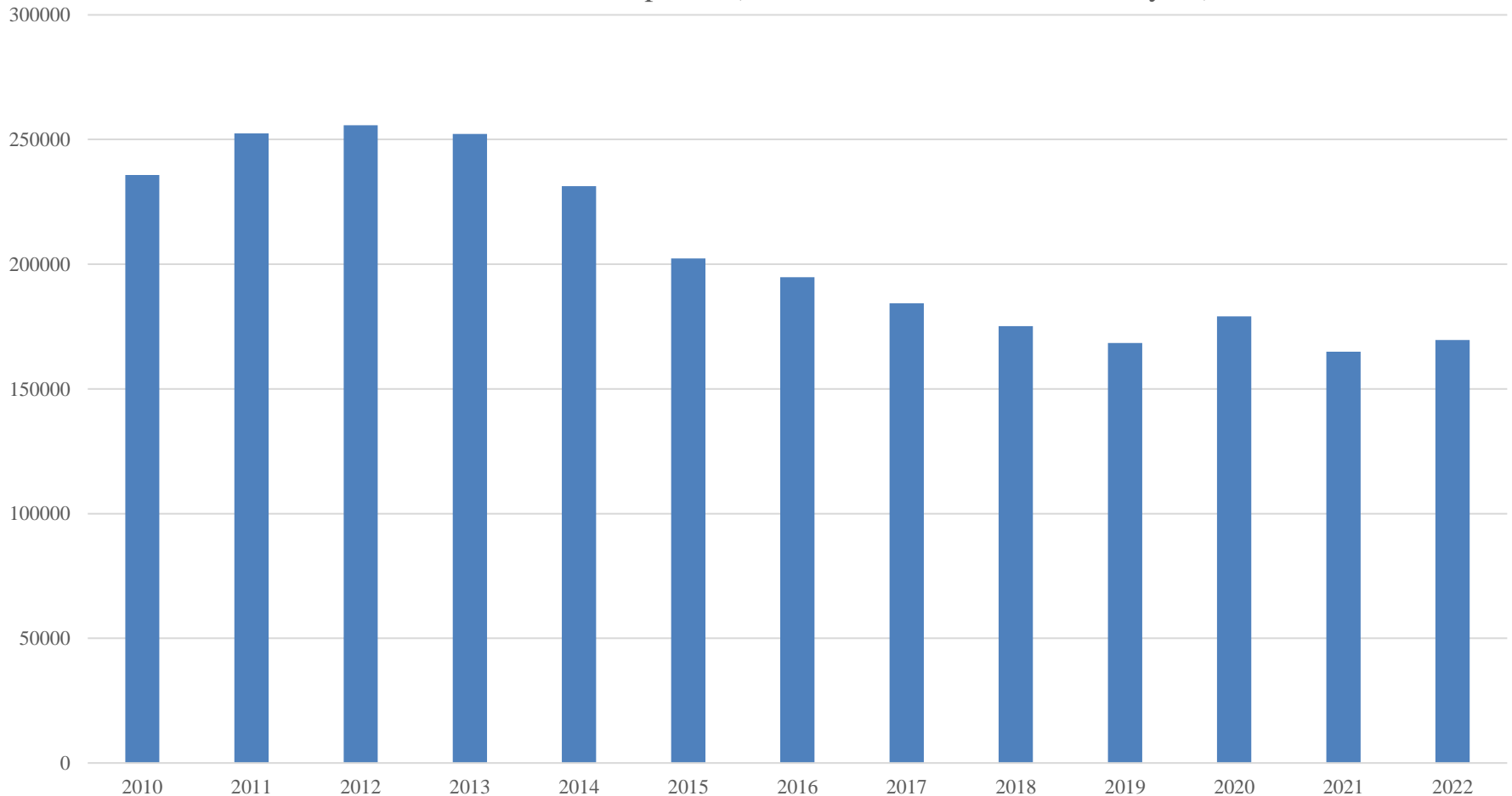
OFl: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Maine SNAP:

- 96,740 cases; 167,793 individuals in Maine receive food benefits
- Benefits are 100% federally-funded; there is a state-funded program for non-citizens with legal status
- States administer the program and determine eligibility
- Maine also administers a contract for SNAP-Education
- States fund 50% of the administrative costs
- Total federal benefits in SFY22 = \$540 million*
 - * Includes Pandemic related maximums and P-EBT benefits for students

OFI: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

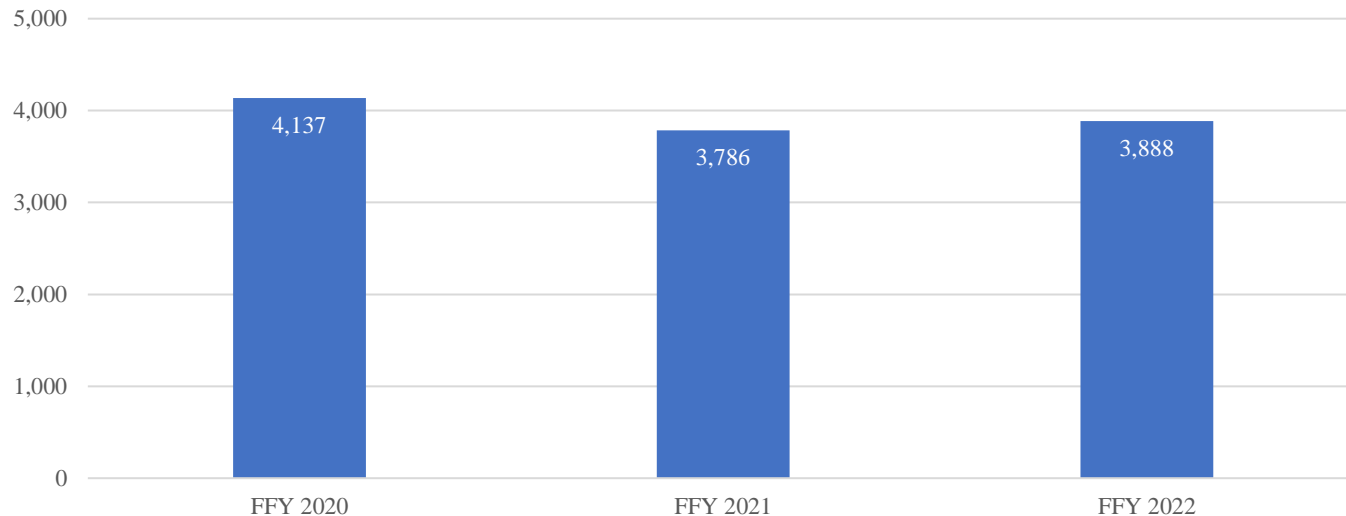
Participation (Point in time data, June of each year)



OFI: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) provides temporary cash benefits to families with minor children in the home. It is a federally funded program through a \$78 million block grant which requires a state Maintenance of Effort (MOE) equal to \$37.5 million

Average TANF Caseload (Households)



Employment & Training Programs



ASPIRE Program

The ASPIRE (Additional Support for People in Retraining and Employment) Program is Maine's federally-required education and employment support program for TANF participants. The Program currently serves over 4,500 Mainers, offering services designed to assist in obtaining sustainable careers through education, career preparation, and attaining and retaining employment. Services are provided through the Department's contractor, Fedcap, and support services, such as assistance with childcare and transportation, are requested by Fedcap and distributed by OFI. In December of 2022, 101 Mainers obtained employment through ASPIRE. Thirty of those individuals were employed in health care or social assistance, with the remaining finding positions in a wide range of fields, from transportation and warehousing to construction and hospitality.

The Parents as Scholars, or PaS, Program assists ASPIRE participants with two- and four-year postsecondary education. This program currently serves almost 80 participants and can provide those students with all supports available to other ASPIRE participants as well as funds for tuition reimbursement.

The HOPE Program

- **Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment (HOPE)** is a workforce development program aimed at helping parents with low incomes graduate from meaningful higher education. By offering financial supports for education-related costs and providing higher education navigators, HOPE helps parents access and complete valuable training and education for various occupations. HOPE's graduates have enhanced skills that allow them to become more competitive and advance within jobs in Maine's economy.
- **Who qualifies?** Parents and specified relatives of minor children who are Maine residents, are accepted to or enrolled in an eligible postsecondary education program, meet HOPE income requirements, and are not receiving TANF/PaS benefits may qualify.
- HOPE is currently supporting 425 students. Of these, 165 are in bachelor's programs related to health care, technology or engineering, 205 are pursuing associate degrees, and 55 are in short-term occupational trainings.
- **How many credentials have parents earned so far?** A total of 221 credentials have been earned since HOPE began helping parents graduate.
- To learn more about the HOPE Program
 - call: (207) 624-4170
 - email: hope.dhhs@maine.gov
 - visit: www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofi/programs-services/hope



Maine's Whole Family Services

- Multi-generational coaching programs
- \$2 million annually from Maine's TANF block grant
- Available to families under 200% FPL with children
- Contracted with 11 services providers to serve all 16 counties
- Total program capacity is around 550 families

Whole Family Approach

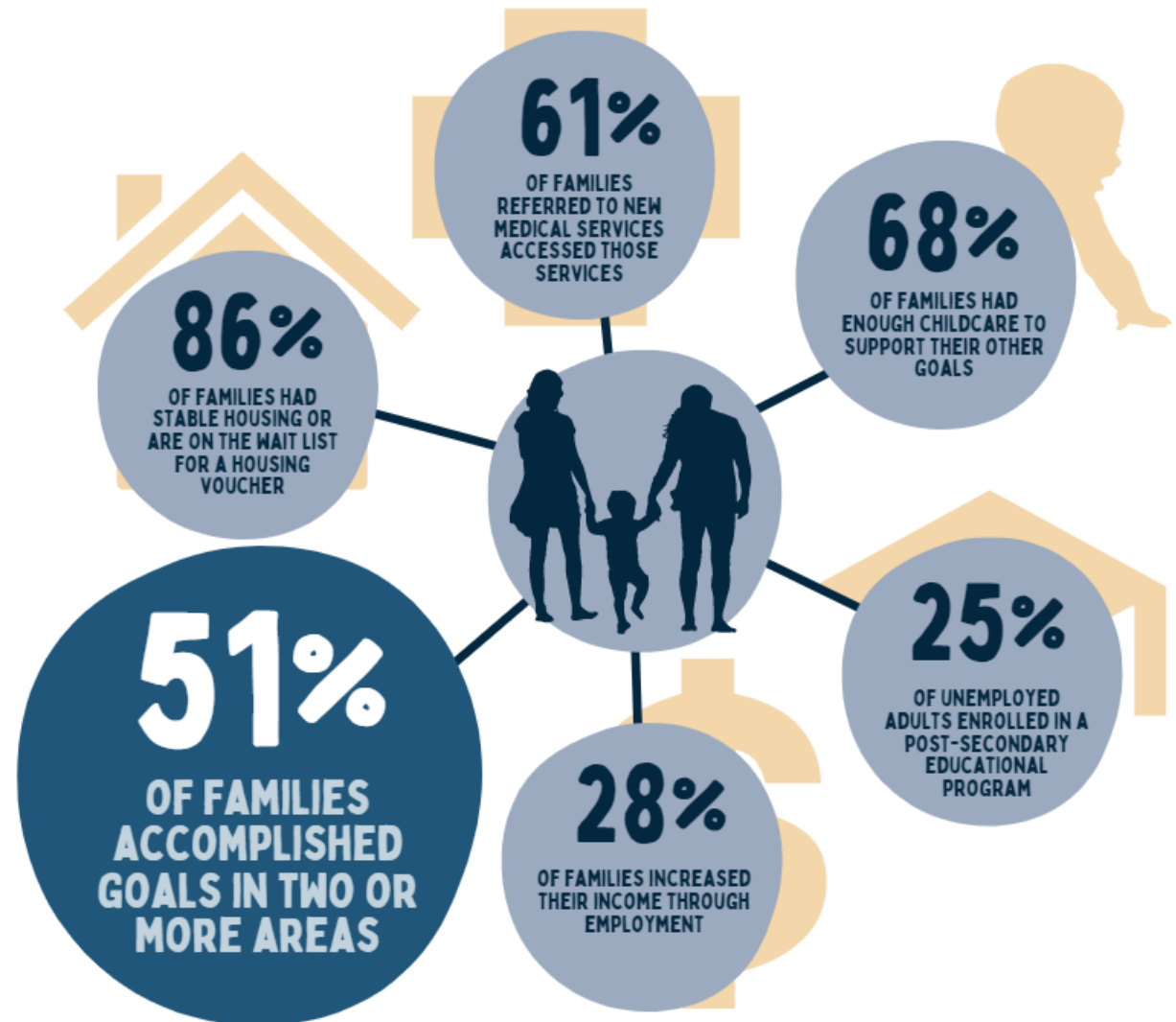
- Families define short- and long-term goals for all members of the household, including children.
- Services use strengths-based family-centered coaching practices, as opposed to more traditional case management.
- Family Coaches help families access housing, healthcare, education, employment, and more, depending on the needs and desires of each family.

Maine's Whole Family Services Year 1 Program Outcomes

437 Families

556 Adults

799 Children



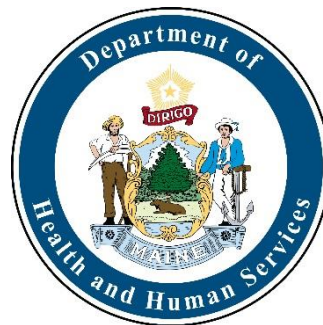
SNAP Employment and Training Program

SNAP-E&T is an optional program for adults receiving SNAP benefits.

- Helps SNAP recipients with job training and education so they can find and keep good paying jobs.
- Reimburses job search training and assistance, vocational training (including Adult Education, certificate and degree programs), job retention services, case management, and more including reimbursement for transportation, childcare, books, tools, and equipment. All training opportunities are available at no cost to participants.
- Expects to serve 300 participants in FFY'23.
- Includes statewide programming by these contracted providers:
 - Aroostook County Community Action Program (ACAP)
 - Goodwill of Northern New England (NNE)
 - Strengthen Lewiston/Auburn
 - Sunrise County Economic Council (Family Futures Downeast and Start Up Downeast)
 - Partnership with Maine DOL Competitive Skills Scholarship Program
- For more information see:

<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofl/programs-services/food-supplement/fset>

Additional Programs and Divisions



OFI: General Assistance (GA)

General Assistance is administered by municipalities. Municipalities determine eligibility (based on State regulations) and share the cost of providing the benefit. The State pays 70% of the cost as of July 2015. The municipalities are responsible for the remaining 30%.

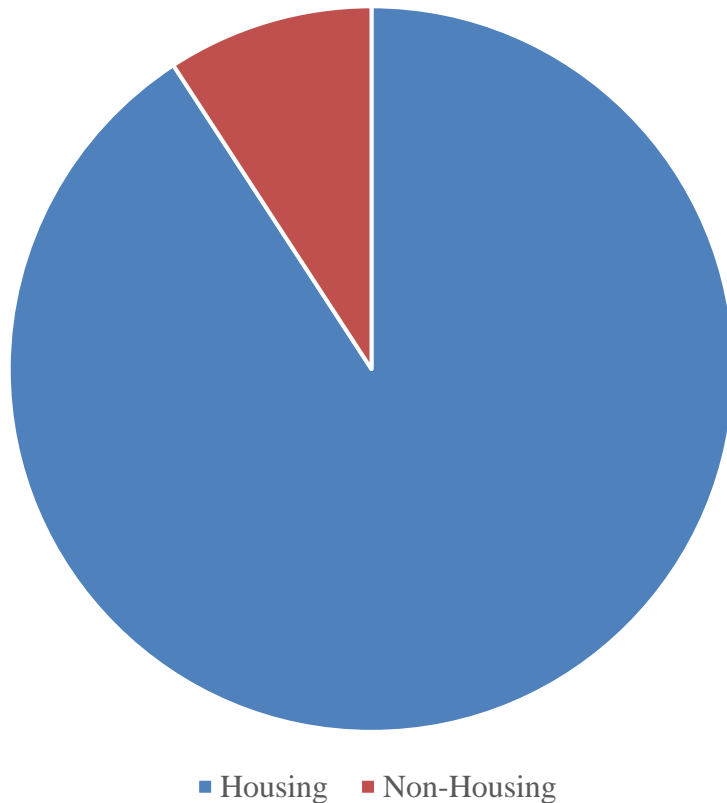
The State portion of total GA reimbursements requested for SFY22, was \$26 million

General Assistance Cost 2007 - 2022



OFI: GA Expenditure Breakdown

General Assistance Expenditures
SFY 2022



Historically, approximately 80% of General Assistance dollars have been utilized for housing or housing related expenses. This has increased to 91% in SFY22.

Housing costs include emergency and non-emergency housing expenses such as rental assistance, shelter costs, or hotel/motel.

Non-housing costs can include heating, food, medical, and other personal expenses. GA also helps cover the cost of burials for eligible individuals.

Division of Support Enforcement and Recovery (DSER)

- Locates parents and establishes paternity for children of unwed parents
- Establishes, modifies and enforces child support orders (50,000 enforcement actions annually)
- Collects and distributes child support to custodial parents

What we did in 2022:

- Collected \$101.8 million in current and past due child support
- Established parentage for 677 children born out of wedlock
- Established and modified 732 child support orders
- Managed 36,165 child support cases, serving 49,116 children eligible for support

Child Support Collections by Action	
Lottery Intercept	\$35,119.00
Gambling Intercept	\$207,770.00
Passport Denial	\$121,000.00
Bank Garnishments	\$736,000.00
Insurance Settlements	\$361,800.00
State Tax Returns	\$2,700,000.00
Unemployment Offset	\$2,600,000.00
Federal Tax Returns	\$10,700,000.00
Wage Withholding	\$57,600,000.00

Disability Determination Services (DDS)

- Provides the medical determination portion of applications for Social Security Title 2 (SSDI) and Title 16 (SSI) disability claims.
- Collects and develops medical records, reviews evidence in collaboration with in-house Medical and Psychological staff, analyzes vocational histories, and makes policy compliant determinations on initial and reconsideration claims.
- Also provides medical determinations on continuing disability reviews to ensure those receiving disability benefits continue to meet the threshold of needing these benefits.

What we did in 2022:

- Processed 15,178 total claim types
- 42.6% of initial claims resulted in an allowance of benefits
- Achieved an initial claim decisional accuracy rate of 98.7%

Case Processed by Claim Type in 2022		
Initial Claims		8,938
Reconsider Claims		2,069
Continuing Disability Reviews		3,528
CDR Cessation Hearings		255
Other Types		388

OFI: Fraud Investigation and Recovery Unit

The Fraud, Investigation and Recovery Unit (FIRU) is authorized under statute to investigate fraud, attempted fraud, commingling or misapplication of funds administered by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Criminal Referrals by FIRU 2018-2022

Referred to:	Cases Referred	Alleged Theft
Maine Attorney General	53	\$1,612,516.28
US District Attorney	87	\$52,265.54
Federal Prosecutors	4	\$796,309.70

Special Projects and Initiatives



CORE Training

CORE: Culture Of Respect and Empathy II

- Building off the introductory training created in 2019 and provided to all OFI employees in 2020, OFI staff expanded CORE training to provide awareness and education on additional topics like how to be an ally and bystander intervention.
- CORE training explores issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and is an important investment in the workforce to assist in reducing conscious and unconscious bias and stigma when working with clients that come to DHHS.
- All OFI staff have now been trained in both CORE modules, and the program has been offered across the Department.

OFI: Major Technology Initiatives

- Winter energy assistance efforts – Heat funding, LIAP, Efficiency Maine
- Implementation of Medicaid “Ex-Parte” (MAGI Passive Renewals) June 2023
- Pandemic Response Unwinding and Noticing Efforts:
 - ❑ Ensured maximum SNAP Issuance monthly
 - ❑ Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT)
 - ❑ Maintained open eligibility for MaineCare recipients
- Data Exchange/Interface Automation efforts in support of Ex-Parte and future projects emphasizing automated eligibility and enrollment
- My Maine Connection replacement and future enhancements: functionality for Authorized Representative and Cash programs October 2023

Public Health Emergency: Transition Planning

During the Public Health Emergency and in partnership with the Federal Government, Maine deployed numerous flexibilities to better serve Maine residents while keeping the public safe during a time of great need. Some of the flexibilities included:

- Continuing MaineCare coverage for most individuals (required by CMS)
- Issuing additional SNAP benefits to a maximum allotment and implementing a pandemic electronic benefit transfer program to provide meals for eligible students (allowed for & funded by the federal government)
- Streamlined application and recertification processes and expanded communication channels with online service improvements and implementing video options in regional offices.

With the passage of the Consolidated Appropriations Act Omnibus bill at the end of 2022, the federal government separated many federal flexibilities from the designation of the Public Health Emergency. OFI and sister agencies at the Department have been preparing for this “unwinding” process and look forward to providing more information to the Legislature about the impacts on clients and programs.

Questions

Anthony Pelotte, Director

