

STATE OF MAINE

—
IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-FOUR

—
H.P. 1111 - L.D. 1732

An Act Regarding the General Assistance Program

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 22 MRSA §4302-A is enacted to read:

§4302-A. Training for overseers and municipal officials

1. Training required. No later than the 120th day after appointment or election, an overseer, municipal official designated by the overseers to administer this chapter and any municipal official appointed to administer this chapter shall complete training on the requirements of this chapter.

2. Training; minimum requirements. The department shall ensure that all overseers and municipal officials have access to training required in subsection 1, at no cost to the overseer or municipal official, that can be completed in less than 4 hours and is accessible either in person, online or via a pre-recorded video presentation. At a minimum, the training must include instruction on the purpose of the general assistance program, the delivery of trauma-informed services and culturally and linguistically appropriate services as defined in section 4305, subsection 7 and the laws governing the general assistance program's administration, procedures and requirements.

Sec. 2. 22 MRSA §4304, sub-§1, as amended by PL 1991, c. 209, §1, is further amended to read:

1. Local office. There must be in each municipality a general assistance office or designated place where any person may apply for general assistance ~~at~~ during the municipality's regular, reasonable times designated by the municipal officers business hours. Notice must be posted of these times, the name of the overseer available to take applications in an emergency at all other times, the fact that the municipality must issue a written decision on all applications within 24 hours and the department's toll-free telephone number for reporting alleged violations in accordance with section 4321.

Sec. 3. 22 MRSA §4305, sub-§7 is enacted to read:

7. Appropriate services. A municipality, in administering a general assistance program, shall provide trauma-informed services and culturally and linguistically appropriate services to all applicants. For purposes of this subsection, "trauma-informed

services" means services that acknowledge and are informed by the widespread effects of trauma and recognize the potential paths for recovery; recognize the unique signs and symptoms of trauma in applicants, clients, families and staff; respond by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures and practices; and seek to actively avoid retraumatization. For purposes of this subsection, "culturally and linguistically appropriate services" means services that are designed to serve culturally diverse populations in a person's preferred language; function effectively within the context of cultural beliefs, behaviors and needs presented by a person who applies to or is a recipient of assistance from a general assistance program and the person's community; contribute to a work environment that supports diversity; promote community engagement; build trust and relationships with applicants and recipients; actively support and enable recipients to make informed choices; and value and facilitate the exchange of information with recipients.

Sec. 4. 22 MRSA §4307, sub-§4, as amended by PL 2017, c. 130, §1, is further amended to read:

4. Special circumstances. Overseers of a municipality may not move or transport an applicant or recipient into another municipality to relieve their municipality of responsibility for that applicant's or recipient's support. The municipality of responsibility for relocations and institutional settings is as follows.

A. When an applicant or recipient requests relocation to another municipality and the overseers of a municipality assist that person to relocate to another municipality, the municipality from which that person is moving continues to be responsible for the support of the recipient for 30 days, including processing applications and determining eligibility for assistance, unless otherwise agreed upon by the affected municipalities, for 6 months after relocation. As used in this paragraph, "assist" includes:

- (1) Granting financial assistance to relocate; and
- (2) Making arrangements for a person to relocate.

B. If an applicant is in a group home, shelter, rehabilitation center, nursing home, hospital or other institution at the time of application and has either been in that institution for 6 12 months or less; or had a residence immediately prior to entering the institution ~~which~~ that the applicant had maintained and to which the applicant intends to return, the municipality of responsibility is the municipality where the applicant was a resident immediately prior to entering the institution and that municipality continues to be responsible for the support of the recipient, including processing applications and determining eligibility for assistance, unless otherwise agreed upon by the affected municipalities. For the purpose of this paragraph, a hotel, motel or similar place of temporary lodging is considered an institution when a municipality:

- (1) Grants financial assistance for a person to move to or stay in temporary lodging;
- (2) Makes arrangements for a person to stay in temporary lodging;
- (3) Advises or encourages a person to stay in temporary lodging; or
- (4) Illegally denies housing assistance and, as a result of that denial, the person stays in temporary lodging.

Sec. 5. 22 MRSA §4323, sub-§1, as corrected by RR 2021, c. 2, Pt. B, §202, is amended by enacting a new last blocked paragraph to read:

The department is responsible for ensuring that each municipality complies with its duty to provide trauma-informed services and culturally and linguistically appropriate services as defined in section 4305, subsection 7. The department shall provide mandatory training to municipalities to ensure that a municipality is able to comply with the requirements of this chapter.

Sec. 6. 22 MRSA §4323, sub-§6 is enacted to read:

6. Database. Beginning on July 1, 2025, the department shall provide overseers access to an Internet-based, real-time database containing the information necessary to properly determine an applicant's eligibility.

Sec. 7. 22 MRSA §4327 is enacted to read:

§4327. Reporting

The department shall use municipal reports, data from the statewide online database required under section 4323, subsection 6 and other metrics to generate a general assistance report to be submitted to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over general assistance matters no later than January 30, 2026 and no later than January 30th of each odd-numbered calendar year thereafter. The initial report must include recommendations regarding a potential extension of the general assistance eligibility period beyond the 30-day limit established in section 4310, subsection 4. All reports must include metrics for: the number of individuals and families who received funds; the basic necessities for which those funds were provided; the length of time those funds were received; which municipalities accessed technical assistance and the number of times that technical assistance was requested, including instances outside of normal business hours; the type of technical assistance municipalities required; the number of calls to the department's general assistance hotline; and the number and content of complaints received and additional metrics as determined necessary by the department. The report must also include data illustrating municipal poverty levels, or regional or county poverty data when municipal-level poverty data is unavailable, and data regarding the use of other public benefit programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program in each municipality.

Sec. 8. Application. That section of this Act that enacts the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 22, section 4302-A applies to all overseers and municipal officials serving on and after the effective date of this Act.