



Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association (MMA)

In Support of
LD 1050, *Resolve, Directing the Department of Labor to Request a Federal Waiver to Allow
Presumptive Work Eligibility for Asylum Seekers*

March 21, 2023

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and members of the Labor and Housing Committee. My name is Kate Dufour, and I am submitting testimony in support of LD 1050 on behalf of the 70 municipal leaders elected by their peers to serve on the Association's Legislative Policy Committee and directed to establish positions on bills of municipal interest.

Over the last year, Maine's largest communities have experienced significant increases in the number of asylees seeking assistance, primarily through the General Assistance (GA) program. Increasing food, fuel, and housing costs, coupled with delays in the processing of federal work permit paperwork, have shifted burdens onto property taxpayers without recourse or additional reimbursement.

Between 2013 and 2022, the state's share for GA expenditures was roughly \$11.2 million, annually. However, as of late, the lingering effects of a global pandemic and the resulting flight to Maine, the rapid conversion of year-round housing to short-term rentals, a booming housing market, and the increasing costs of necessities are all impacting the GA program. In 2023, state reimbursement under the GA program jumped to \$23 million, increasing the combined state and municipal expenditure to an all-time high of \$32 million.

Additionally, municipalities struggle to find housing for new families, English as a Second Language programs are at capacity, social services programs are overwhelmed, and municipal staff are facing burnout, which is fueling workforce retention challenges.

These unintended consequences could be avoided if asylum seekers were allowed to work shortly after relocating to the U.S. The solution would not only help these new Mainers to settle into their communities quickly and permanently, but also help in addressing the state's workforce challenges. Municipal leaders have heard repeatedly that asylum seekers are eager to contribute to their communities by sharing their skills, expertise, and talents.

It is for this reason that municipal officials encourage ongoing support for initiatives that fast-track the issuance of work permits at every stage of the process, and therefore we encourage your support for LD 1050.

Thank you for considering the municipal perspective on this issue. If you have any questions about our position, please contact me at kdufour@memun.org or 592-4038.