



Senator Jill Duson
3 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0003
(207) 287-1515
Jill.Duson@legislature.maine.gov

Testimony of Senator Jill Duson in Support of LD 1664, “An Act to Increase Reimbursement Under the General Assistance Program”
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
May 5, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Distinguished Colleagues on the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Jill Duson. I represent Senate District 27, which includes parts of Westbrook and Portland. I am here to speak in favor of LD 1664, “An Act to Increase Reimbursement Under the General Assistance Program.”

Across the state, the need for General Assistance has greatly increased. The sharp increase in GA costs is a consequence of much deeper, systemic issues, including a lack of appropriate housing for a variety of populations. While meaningful steps are being taken by the Legislature to address these issues, the financial consequences of these issues, as reflected in rising GA costs, underscores the urgency with which they must be addressed.

Portland, just like the rest of the state, has been facing serious challenges due to the current housing crisis. Between FY19 and FY22, general assistance (GA) client expenses increased by 345%, as a result of the drastic increase in demand for emergency housing. In FY22, a total of \$32.56M was spent on GA client expenses in Portland, 70% of which was reimbursed, equaling \$22.79 million.

The City of Portland receives and approves an enormous number of GA applications each year. Many of the individuals approved for GA come to Portland from other Maine municipalities, states, and countries. The needs of Portland reflect the needs of municipalities statewide that require a higher reimbursement rate in order to effectively fulfill its GA obligations and avoid cutting back on other essential programs and services. It is our duty as legislators to ensure the residents of Maine have access to the resources they need to survive, and thrive. This bill is critical to making this happen.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.