

General Assistance Testimony

Part S- GA

January 23, 2025

Public Hearing on GA- Part S

AFA Committee

January 23, 2025 at 1:00 PM

Mary Hoffman-Town of Hollis-General Assistance Administrator

(207) 298-9698

Good afternoon to the esteemed members of the AFA Committee:

I am the General Assistance Administrator for the Town of Hollis, Maine and am appalled that there would even be on consideration of Part S related to General Assistance in the budget. Obviously, many individuals are not aware of the extremely large number of individuals throughout the State of Maine who are living on the edge of poverty.

According to the public information that was presented by the United Way of Southern Maine in the ALICE report, (Asset-Limited-Income-Constrained-Employment) to the Select Board of Hollis, the following numbers were presented for York County. Approximately, 9% of those were at the poverty level. This is very misleading if you consider that an additional 39% if those individuals living in York County or 36,887 households being on the edge of poverty. On the graphs that were shown, Hollis's residents fall within that 39% group of individuals being on the edge of poverty.

The Hardest Hit Populations were identified as those who were elderly (over 65) and the youngest (under 25). The older population affected are experiencing deep financial hardships. 79% are single female-headed households. 47 % of Black households within York compared 40% of white households are affected. Those households with young children are having trouble with not only finding childcare so that they can work but also having problems being able to pay for that child care. 41% of those individuals cut work hours; 24% supervise their children while working; and 35% must take unpaid leave just to be able to work and take care of their children.

Many households find that they are spending an exorbitant amount regardless of whether they rent (49% are rent burdened) or own (48% of home owners are cost burdened).The additional information available from the United Way with the ALICE research is extremely interesting to review.

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My own experience with Hollis's residents is very similar. Most individuals helped in Hollis are just above the overall maximums allowed by General Assistance. The majority have had a major incident which has impacted their ability to continue to pay the rent, electric, and heat bills. Examples would be a car accident without any insurance (they can't afford the insurance); a furnace which stops working; being fired from a job because their children have been ill and needed to be at home; and a multitude of other reasons. But enough to make them not to be able to make ends meet or just paying the minimum amount so that they do not get evicted; trying to be able to get fuel during a cold spell; have transportation to/from work; paying enough on the electric bill so it does not get disconnected.

Review of their expenses often demonstrate that despite working, they just do not have enough to cover inflated costs. Examples would be their rent being raised by \$500 because landlords can without any updates made to the apartments; having individuals not have kerosene which is included because the landlord does not order it; having to use electric heaters because the heat source does not include the whole apartment and electricity is not included; increased food and gas prices; and increased costs for child care so that they can work.

Often, they can be successful with just a little bit of assistance to get them out of the 'hole' that seems impossible to get out of. Think about your credit card bill which states that if you only pay the minimum due you can pay off your bill in 7 years and 3 months, but do not make another purchase.

Shame on anyone for even considering excluding up to 48% of the households in York County (9% poverty and 39 % living paycheck to paycheck).

I strongly object to having General Assistance be where we determine to cut costs and not afford those who are trying to work, raise children, and pay their bills assistance when needed.

Thank you for listening.

Mary Hoffman

General Assistance Administrator for Hollis, Maine

(207) 298-9698

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Mary Hoffman
Hollis
LD 209

Thanks for listening. File attached.