



January 23, 2025

Senator Rotondo, Representative Gattine, and Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee,

My name is Martha Stein I am the Executive Director of Hope Acts, a 501 c 3 nonprofit organization in Portland with a mission to offer asylum seekers access to housing and basic needs, assistance in navigating complex immigration processes, and resources for learning English to help them successfully transition to a new life in Maine. I strongly oppose Part S of LD 209, "An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2025."

Federal Law prohibits asylum seekers from working until they have applied for asylum and then wait for at least 180 days until they are allowed to work in the United States – when they receive a work permit. This budget proposal would create unprecedented homelessness for the immigrant community. General Assistance is the ONLY mechanism available to pay for asylum seeker housing until these New Mainers are allowed to work.

Last year a pregnant young lady came into our office because a minor issue (that was ultimately resolved) jeopardized the GA payment for her apartment. She was so distraught that she collapsed in our office. We called 911. Portland's emergency services responded quickly (I believe a fire truck and an ambulance) and this woman was taken to the emergency room at Maine Medical Center. I can't imagine how much that must have cost, but it was way more than the modest rent payment for a room in a shared apartment. General Assistance is a lifeline.

In addition to the inhumane toll this General Assistance would take on our community, let's remember that Maine needs immigrants. Thousands are legally working, including many in low-paying caregiving and hospitality positions that employers would not otherwise be able to fill. Countless economic reports demonstrate how much we depend on immigrants for the state's economic health.

It is unthinkable that during a prolonged affordable housing crisis, the state would consider a budget that could cause thousands of people to become homeless. What would that cost? I strongly urge the Committee to reject Part S of LD 209.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Martha Stein
Executive Director

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