



City of Auburn, Maine

Office of the Mayor

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January 22, 2022

Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
c/o Office of Fiscal and Program Review
5 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04210

Dear Senator Rotundo and Representative Gattine,

Written Testimony Regarding GA-Part S of the Supplemental Budget

On behalf of the City of Auburn, I am submitting this written testimony regarding GA-Part S of the Supplemental Budget. We understand the need to reduce the budget, and the difficult decisions involved in addressing fiscal constraints. However, we have concerns about the potential impact of these reductions, particularly on vulnerable residents who rely on public assistance to attain or maintain housing.

Concerns Regarding GA-Part S of the Supplemental Budget

While we acknowledge the necessity of addressing budgetary challenges, the proposed reductions to public assistance programs raise concerns for those in our community who depend on these services to maintain housing stability. Reductions in duration of rental assistance could exacerbate the hardships faced by individuals and families in Auburn, especially those already struggling with barriers to maintaining stable housing.

Recommendation: Point of Enactment, Not Lookback

The City of Auburn recommends that any reductions or changes to eligibility for benefits be applied prospectively, from the point of enactment, rather than retroactively. Retroactive cuts could create unnecessary disruptions for individuals and families who have made important decisions based on the support they currently receive, leading to potential eviction and housing instability.

Impact on Vulnerable Populations

Many residents in Auburn face significant challenges that make it difficult to sustain housing, including:

- **Lack of work authorization**, which limits the ability of some residents to meet their own housing needs.
- **Criminal history**, which presents barriers to qualifying for housing programs and securing employment.
- **Waitlists to access to physical and mental healthcare providers**, making it difficult for some residents to prove mental and physical health challenges that may give them additional eligibility under subsection 1B.

Impact on Increased Applications to Other Organizations

We anticipate that, if these reductions are implemented, there will likely be an increase in applications to other organizations, such as:

- **Low Income Legal Assistance:** More individuals may seek legal assistance for eviction defense and housing-related issues, putting added strain on already overburdened legal aid organizations.
- **Housing Authorities:** A reduction in rental assistance will likely lead to increased demand for services from local Housing Authorities, contributing to longer waiting lists.
- **Social Security:** Residents may seek additional support from Social Security, placing further pressure on the system that currently has a 10 month wait for a hearing.

Critical Questions

In light of the proposed changes, we have several questions that we hope will be addressed:

1. **What happens when reduction of rental assistance causes an eviction that is beyond the control of the tenant?**
 - How will individuals who now have eviction records be affected, particularly when those records may impact their ability to secure future housing?
2. **How will individuals with criminal histories be supported if they cannot meet housing program requirements for secure employment within the 3-month timeframe?**
 - What provisions will be made for individuals who are working to reintegrate into society but face significant housing challenges?
3. **What happens to individuals who are not yet work authorized?**
 - How will the proposal address the needs of individuals who are in the process of obtaining work authorization but are currently unable to work to pay for housing?

Conclusion

The City of Auburn recognizes the importance of addressing the state's budget challenges. However, we ask that the potential impacts of these reductions on vulnerable residents be carefully considered. We encourage decision-makers to apply any changes prospectively and address the critical questions regarding housing, access to support services, and the long-term consequences of these cuts.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey D. Harmon
Mayor