



**FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Testimony of Helen L. Breña and Kiara Simonds before
the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee

in opposition to

Proposed Cuts to General Assistance in the Supplemental Budget

January 23, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and Health and Human Services Committee.

My name is Helen L. Breña, President and CEO of the YMCA of Southern Maine. With me is Kiara Simonds, our Senior Director. We're here to express our deep concern about the proposed reduction in General Assistance housing support to three months.

Next year marks the 100th anniversary of our Portland men's dormitory program – a century of providing housing stability for those who need it most. Each year, this program serves over 135 individuals who would otherwise be homeless. These aren't just numbers – they're people rebuilding their lives.

We see firsthand how GA housing support creates pathways out of poverty. Our residents include New Americans who arrive with valuable skills and work determinedly to establish themselves in Maine. They're joined by longtime Mainers who, despite significant obstacles, maintain their dignity and wellbeing through GA support.

Maine's housing crisis is at a breaking point. With rents far outpacing wages and a severe housing shortage, three months of GA support is simply insufficient time to secure affordable housing and build the financial stability needed to maintain it.

For example, Jessie used FA for 16 months. That provided him the stability needed for him to get sober. He is now employed and set to move into his own apartment. Pedro utilized GA for 6 months before being able to get a work permit. He was then able to secure a job and save enough to get his own apartment. These are two examples of 17 men in the past year who needed GA for more than three months to become employed and find secure, permanent housing.

Many of our residents are single men who fall through the cracks of our social safety net. They're often ineligible for other assistance programs, making GA their only lifeline against homelessness. Currently, we serve approximately 64 community members each year who rely on GA housing assistance.

We understand this proposal provides exemptions for people with severe disabilities or who are applying for social security. However, the reality we see daily shows how many vulnerable people will still fall through the cracks.

Contact: Helen L. Breña, YMCA of Southern Maine
P: [207-874-1111 **E:** hbrena@ymcaofsouthernmaine.org



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Consider Tony, who struggles with severe mobility limitations from MS but has been repeatedly denied disability benefits. Or Carlos, who became disabled after a medical accident yet doesn't qualify for support programs. Larry manages his schizophrenia daily but cannot maintain steady employment. These men have no family support and no other options. Under the proposed changes, they face imminent homelessness.

When people lose stable housing, they lose access to healthcare providers, case managers, and support services. This creates a devastating domino effect that impacts our entire community - from emergency services to healthcare systems.

We strongly urge this committee to reconsider this severe reduction in GA support. This isn't just a policy change - it's a decision that will force Maine people into homelessness. This critical investment provides the foundation people need to rebuild their lives and contribute to Maine's future.

Thank you.

Helen L. Breña
President & CEO
YMCA of Southern Maine

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