

Testimony of the Maine Immigrants Rights Coalition (MIRC) In Opposition to LD 209, Part S

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
Senator Rotondo, Representative Gattine, and Esteemed Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee,

My name is Ruben Torres, and I serve as the Advocacy Manager for the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC). I am here today on behalf of our coalition of over 110 member organizations to express our opposition to 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."

Part S proposes a three-month cap on housing assistance under the General Assistance (GA) program and restricts municipalities ability to provide assistance beyond 30 days in a 12-month period. These changes would have devastating consequences for Maine's most vulnerable populations, including asylum seekers and families, while disrupting the systems designed to support them.

Asylum seekers face significant systemic barriers that prevent them from achieving stability without temporary assistance. Federal restrictions on work authorization prevent them from legally earning income for at least six months after filing their asylum applications. Processing delays often extend this waiting period to a year or more. The proposed three-month cap would leave families with no means to pay rent during this critical period, forcing them into impossible situations. Without guaranteed support, securing or maintaining housing becomes nearly unattainable, discouraging landlords from renting to asylum seekers and others in need of GA. In an already tight housing market, this would further reduce access to housing for those who need it most.

Asylum seekers come to Maine seeking safety, stability, and an opportunity to contribute to our state. With proper support, they can—and do—enrich our communities. However, Part S penalizes families and communities striving to succeed under difficult circumstances. It creates unnecessary barriers to stable housing, exacerbates homelessness, and undermines the partnerships between municipalities, landlords, and community organizations that are essential for addressing these challenges.

Maine's strength lies in its commitment to community and inclusion—values that Part S disregards. We urge the Committee to reject Part S of LD 209 and instead focus on solutions that uphold these principles while addressing the needs of all Mainers.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.