

## **Testimony in Opposition to LD 209, Part S**

My name is Robby Perkins-High, and I serve as the Director of Housing Initiatives for ProsperityME. I also serve on Portland's CDBG Allocation Committee and as a Board Member for Ketcha Outdoors, and have a professional background in local government finance and affordable housing.

Part S proposes a three-month cap on housing assistance under the General Assistance (GA) program, except for temporary housing and emergency shelters. This three-month cap would create an entirely preventable housing crisis, while also not achieving the likely intended goal of reducing the state's financial burden.

Due to federal work restrictions, asylum seekers are unable to legally earn income for at least six months. During that time period, they need temporary assistance in order to meet their basic human needs. GA is the primary method by which these families stay housed. ProsperityME works to place as many of these families as much as possible in affordable, safe, clean apartments to ensure their well-being. With this support, they quickly contribute to Maine's economy once their work permit is secured, and no longer need support from the GA program. They are a crucial element of building a thriving and resilient economy in Maine, and have been highlighted as a key population as Maine faces an increasingly severe workforce shortage.

With a GA limit of three months, these families would be forced out of established housing to either sleep outside, or back into temporary housing or emergency shelters. In practice, this means that the state will have the choice of letting these families suffer outside with no means to achieve shelter, or providing emergency shelter for them. With most current shelters at or above capacity, this will mean moving back towards reliance on hotels and other unsuitable housing options, which will cost the state significantly more to operate than the current use of GA does to house this population in rental units.

Part S will cause significant suffering for residents of Maine, and will result in higher costs to the state in doing so. I urge the Committee to reject Part S of LD 209.

Thank you for your time and consideration.