

Amy Hatter  
Auburn  
LD 209

Dear Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee,

My name is Amy Hatter, and I am writing to express my strong opposition to Part S of the supplemental budget, which proposes a significant reduction in funding for the General Assistance (GA) program. GA provides essential housing and basic needs support for individuals and families with limited or no income. Cutting this critical assistance from 12 months to just 3 months will have devastating effects on the most vulnerable members of our community, especially asylum seekers.

As a transplant from a state without GA or a similar safety net, I felt proud to call Maine my new home because of the care it provided for its residents. However, cutting funds to our most vulnerable families represents a significant step backward in a time of increasing need. Housing is already in short supply in our state.

Maine faces an affordable housing shortage, with a deficit of approximately 20,000 rental units. The average monthly rent in Maine has increased significantly, with some areas seeing rises of over 25% in recent years. The scarcity of affordable housing means that the proposed changes will only push more families into shelters or, worse yet, onto the streets. The three-month limit would force families into a precarious situation, as they would be unable to stay housed long enough to get back on their feet.

The three-month cap on GA housing assistance and the restriction on municipal flexibility to provide support beyond this period will directly jeopardize the housing stability of families who have nowhere else to turn. GA is already a program of last resort, and limiting access to this support will create a severe gap for families waiting for work permits, facing financial hardship, or lacking other options for stable housing. Without the ability to extend this vital support, families will be left vulnerable, and many will face eviction and homelessness.

The cost of housing through the GA program is a fraction of the cost of temporary shelter alternatives. For instance, a summer hotel stay in Cumberland County can cost upwards of \$5,000 per month during the summer. At the same time, rental units supported by GA are typically between \$1,000 and \$2,000 per month—much more affordable and sustainable for both individuals and the community. By reducing GA funding, the government is pushing vulnerable individuals into more costly and unstable living situations, placing even greater strain on emergency and transitional shelters that are already overwhelmed and underfunded.

Municipal flexibility has been an essential tool in supporting families who are awaiting work permits or dealing with unforeseen hardships. Local governments are best positioned to understand the unique needs of their communities, and they have proven time and time again that they can effectively support families through temporary housing needs. Removing this ability undermines local control and places an undue burden on already struggling municipalities.

Additionally, asylum seekers often face long delays—sometimes a year or more—in receiving work authorization and are ineligible for most forms of public assistance, including subsidized housing programs like Section 8. As a result, they rely heavily on the GA program as a temporary safety net while waiting for the right to work and support themselves. Reducing this support to just 3 months will leave them and their children with nowhere to turn when the limit is reached. Their only option will be overcrowded emergency shelters, which are already at capacity, more expensive, and less stable than permanent housing options.

We must not forget the positive contributions asylum seekers make to Maine's economy. Once granted work permits, they become essential workers in key industries like agriculture, healthcare, and hospitality—sectors facing significant labor shortages. According to the American Immigration Council, immigrants in Maine

paid over \$625.1 million in taxes in 2022 and had \$1.7 billion in spending power. Supporting asylum seekers and refugees during their waiting period isn't just the right thing to do—it's a smart investment in Maine's long-term economic future.

The reduction in GA support will also disproportionately impact children, who are among our most vulnerable citizens. Families will be forced into homelessness, and the long-term consequences of living without stable housing can significantly harm children's health, education, and overall well-being. These cuts will create ripple effects throughout the community, generating long-term challenges that may ultimately cost taxpayers more than the short-term savings the budget seeks to achieve.

The GA program serves as a vital lifeline for those in need, providing temporary assistance to help people rebuild their lives and integrate into society. Cutting this support is not only a moral failure but also risks exacerbating the strain on our emergency systems, making it even harder for vulnerable populations to recover and thrive.

I strongly urge you to reconsider this proposed reduction and maintain full funding for the General Assistance program. It is imperative that we continue to support those who need help the most, particularly in times of uncertainty and hardship.

Sincerely,  
Amy Hatter