

Good afternoon,

My name is Melissa Schott. I am a clinical mental health counselor and financial educator employed by Fairtide in Kittery. Fairtide is contracted to deliver General Assistance administration for Kittery and Eliot. I'd like to speak today on the impact the proposed Supplemental Budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, particularly Part S, would have on the health of our communities.

This proposal would negatively impact the most vulnerable in our community. Every day, I meet fellow Mainers who are desperate to survive. The cost of basic necessities such as housing, food, and heat are increasing by the month. General Assistance applicants are often eager to access resources such as job coaching or budgeting classes that would allow them to be financially self-sufficient.

The average neighbor I meet needs General Assistance for only a month or two following an unexpected disruption to employment. They don't want to be reliant on a welfare program. These applicants are simply terrified of losing their housing or watching their children go to bed hungry. This is when they turn to the program of last resort.

Then there are the rare and extraordinary cases that require more than just that month or two. These are Mainers facing complex circumstances such as an impending disability or the loss of a primary wage earner. In my experience, additional General Assistance support is used to help applicants access other resources that can provide long-term stability outside of General Assistance.

Our communities thrive when residents are safe and secure enough to foster a sense of belonging. The proposed budgetary limitations described in Part S would unduly hurt those who are most at risk: our elderly, our disabled, and our children. General Assistance is the last social safety net someone has before facing eviction, hunger, or cold. Our communities will not be served by seeing an increase in homelessness. In fact, this will ultimately place a greater financial strain on town budgets.

I strongly urge you to reject the proposed limitations on General Assistance. Please trust administrators throughout the state to exercise good judgement and common sense. Please consider the vast array of research that demonstrates the impact poverty has on the health and well-being of not just the one person, but for the whole town.

Thank you for accepting my comments and for the diligent work you do on behalf of all Mainers.