



Dear Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and the honorable members of the joint standing committee of Appropriations and Financial Affairs Health and Human Services Committee.

My name is Michelle and I'm the executive director of Greater Portland Family Promise. Family Promise works to address the needs of the growing homeless population and to prevent and reduce homelessness through transitional housing, permanent housing, food assistance, housing navigation and housing stabilization services. All programs and services combined give families a better chance of long-lasting success.

The mission of Family Promise is to help families experiencing homelessness to achieve sustainable independence through a community-based response. Public benefits like General Assistance as one of the many vital safety net programs the families work with rely on. Family Promise provides housing navigation and housing stability case management to help families access affordable housing and to be successful tenants in their new homes without support from General Assistance families would not be able to secure an apartment and pay rent until they find employment and wages to cover their monthly expenses.

We are experiencing a housing crisis and further cuts to GA will devastate Mainers and will increase homelessness, there will be no place for families to go, no chance for upward mobility. The goal is to move families out of homelessness and into permanent, stable housing.

This new 3-month time limit, proposed in Governor Mills in the supplemental budget destroys pulls this safety net out from under people. The average amount of time a family may rely on GA is for 12 months, not 3 months. Once a family secures TANF Temporary Assistance to Needy Families they only need less General Assistance to cover their monthly expenses for rent, food, toiletries, diapers and utilities. This proposal directly affects people in permanent housing, making it harder for them to remain housed.

Many of the families we assist are asylum seekers, and the process from their arrival to obtaining a work permit can often take more than 6 months. During this time, they have been assisted by the GA, then comes the waiting time to get a job, since work applications can only be made when you already have a work permit and Social Security number.

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One of the moms of one of the families I work with says that when she first arrived in Maine, she was fortunate enough to receive general assistance with paying her rent while she waited for her work permit and to find a job. This waiting period lasted 10 months, which was challenging, but GA helped her family to remain stably housed. Since she started working, she has been able to steadily pay her rent and other expenses without an issue. Another dad I worked with needed help from GA for 11 months. It took him one year to find a job. Landlords will not want to rent to people who can only pay rent for 3 months.

These are some of the many constraints that this new policy will cause. I hope you will give this matter the attention it deserves. Emergency housing assistance needs to go beyond short-term aid to truly help individuals regain their footing and become self-sufficient. The waiting periods and delays families face demonstrate the need for more comprehensive support during this transitional phase. I strongly urge you to reject Part S of LD 209.

Sincerely,



Michelle Lamm, Executive Director
Greater Portland Family Promise