

January 23, 2025

Dear Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee,

I write to urge you to expand the time limits and remove restrictions to Part S of LD 209. Limiting General Assistance to 3 months would harm many of our new Mainer families while they await their authorization to work. People who come to Maine in search of a safer life come with hopes and dreams of contributing to our communities. They want to work and make their own way. Unfortunately the current wait time for federal work authorization averages 9 months to a year.

As a resident of Portland and Director of Programs at ProsperityME, a non-profit providing economic empowerment programs for immigrants and low-income individuals, I see every day the skills, expertise and talents contributed by new Mainer friends and colleagues. Clients we have assisted have found good jobs and contribute to our workforce, our communities and they pay taxes. A woman who participated in our Charting Your Course program and received assistance while awaiting her work authorization is now working at a local non-profit and brings her 15 years of experience in trauma counseling to help others. Another client who participated in our financial education course and volunteered as an interpreter helping others with their résumé and finding employment while awaiting his own work authorization is now employed and he is preparing to start his own business. Our scholarship program assists people who are studying in vitally important fields such as healthcare, IT and engineering. Their families received assistance before they were able to work. And they will be future nurses and professionals helping to grow Maine's economy.

The proposed cap and restrictions would render people in similar situations who need temporary support in difficult, if not unsafe conditions. It would mean more families in shelters or struggling on the streets, children bouncing from one school district to another. We must endeavor to change our perception of short-term support as a burden and view it as an investment in the future of Maine. Expanding the limits and removing additional barriers for our cities and towns is an investment in our state, our communities and our collective future.

Thank you for considering this investment.

Sincerely,
Heather Cameron
Portland Maine

Heather Cameron
Portland
LD 209
January 23, 2025

Dear Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee,

I write to urge you to expand the time limits and remove restrictions to Part S of LD 209. Limiting General Assistance to 3 months would harm many of our new Mainer families while they await their authorization to work. People who come to Maine in search of a safer life come with hopes and dreams of contributing to our communities. They want to work and make their own way. Unfortunately the current wait time for federal work authorization averages 9 months to a year.

As a resident of Portland and Director of Programs at ProsperityME, a non-profit providing economic empowerment programs for immigrants and low-income individuals, I see every day the skills, expertise and talents contributed by new Mainer friends and colleagues. Clients we have assisted have found good jobs and contribute to our workforce, our communities and they pay taxes. A woman who participated in our Charting Your Course program and received assistance while awaiting her work authorization is now working at a local non-profit and brings her 15 years of experience in trauma counseling to help others. Another client who participated in our financial education course and volunteered as an interpreter helping others with their résumé and finding employment while awaiting his own work authorization is now employed and he is preparing to start his own business. Our scholarship program assists people who are studying in vitally important fields such as healthcare, IT and engineering. Their families received assistance before they were able to work. And they will be future nurses and professionals helping to grow Maine's economy.

The proposed cap and restrictions would render people in similar situations who need temporary support in difficult, if not unsafe conditions. It would mean more families in shelters or struggling on the streets, children bouncing from one school district to another. We must endeavor to change our perception of short-term support as a burden and view it as an investment in the future of Maine. Expanding the limits and removing additional barriers for our cities and towns is an investment in our state, our communities and our collective future.

Thank you for considering this investment.

Sincerely,
Heather Cameron
Portland Maine