



# Maine Homeless Policy Committee

February 24, 2025

Re: LD 210, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am submitting testimony as Chair on behalf of the Maine Homeless Policy Committee, which is a joint standing committee of the Statewide Homeless Council and the Maine Continuum of Care.

We are testifying in opposition to a Budget Initiative in the Biennial Budget (LD 210) that would restrict GA rental assistance to no more than three (3) months in a 12-month period (*originally Part S of the Supplemental Budget but was moved into the Biennial Budget for consideration*).

This Budget Initiative would make substantive changes to the General Assistance (GA) program to the detriment of vulnerable people in Maine.

The Supplemental Budget in the Second Session of the 131<sup>st</sup> Legislature made changes to GA statute prohibiting municipalities from exceeding the maximum level of assistance for no more than 30 days for assistance granted on hotels, motels, inns or other lodging places. This Budget Initiative would expand this to include *all* non-housing categories of assistance. Local GA Administrators ought to retain the flexibility to go above GA maximums for a longer duration of time in the rare instances in which it is necessary for the health and well-being of Mainers who depend on GA to meet their basic needs.

An 3-month time limit on the safety net for people in poverty is detrimental.

Most people receive GA for brief time periods; the vast majority of people utilizing GA need assistance for far less than the time limits than this would impose. The small subset of people who need assistance longer will be forced out of stable housing and directly into homelessness once they meet this time limit.

Maine's most vulnerable populations need access to safety net resources and rental assistance through GA, especially with MaineHousing's Housing Choice Voucher (HCV – Section 8) Program being frozen for months with no end in sight. Currently General Assistance rental assistance is the primary way in which emergency shelters and front-line staff are moving people from homelessness into housing. Without access to GA for rent, more people will languish in homelessness, and people currently stably housed could fall into homelessness, and because Maine's homeless shelter system is full, it will mean people will land unsheltered outside, very likely in encampments, something the Statewide Homeless Council has strongly opposed. Our homeless response system is already overburdened – this would exacerbate a crisis situation.

The Maine Homeless Policy Committee initiated legislation to be introduced in the First Regular Session of the 132<sup>nd</sup> legislature to enhance and expand Maine's GA Program – setting arbitrary limits runs counter to needed GA improvements. Please oppose this Budget Initiative (originally Part S of the Supplemental Budget) – we can't afford to have more people in our homeless system. Subsidies are on hold and GA is a lifeline for emptying out the shelters and keeping people from being outside.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.