



Testimony before the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and  
the Housing and Economic Development Committees

**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**

February 24, 2025

Good afternoon, Senators Rotundo and Ingwersen and Representatives Gattine and Meyers, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Housing and Economic Development Committee,

My name is Jane Field, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches. Founded in 1938, the Maine Council of Churches is a nonprofit, ecumenical coalition of seven mainline Protestant member denominations, all of whom have their roots in Hebrew and Christian scripture. Our seven members have more than 400 congregations in Maine with over 50,000 parishioners in their care.

Maine Council of Churches opposes two issues being discussed as part of the Governor's biennial budget: limiting GA rental housing assistance to three (3) months in a twelve (12) month period and Part VV of LD 210, which proposes cuts to the essential support of SNAP and TANF benefits for unemployed noncitizens with work authorization. These cuts will cause devastating and irreversible harm to vulnerable populations and low-income Mainers.

Now is the worst time to slash GA rental assistance because Maine's homeless shelters are already full. GA is often used as a last resort and is one of the only rental assistance programs available to move people from homelessness into housing. Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) are presently frozen, and there are long waiting lists for Permanent Supportive Housing and BRAP. Since these vouchers are on pause, many people remain in emergency shelters or, horrifically, sleep on the streets or in parks.

It is far less expensive to use GA to keep people housed than it is to pay for shelters. The maximum GA reimbursement for a 0-bedroom heated unit in Portland is \$1,434/month. MaineHousing estimates that an average shelter bed cost is \$3,776/month. This calculates an annual savings of \$28,104 per person on GA. Keeping people housed by GA is 163% less expensive than supporting them in a homeless shelter.

Part VV proposes cuts to the essential SNAP and TANF benefits for unemployed noncitizens with work authorization. These state-funded benefits for certain noncitizens are already minimal. They are intended to bridge the gap between permission to work and finding or losing a job when people don't have the means to purchase essentials like food. Cutting them will increase food insecurity and homelessness forcing families to make the impossible choice between paying rent, covering utilities, or putting food on the table. If we share the goal of ending hunger in Maine and building a strong workforce, we must invest in the whole person, recognizing their inherent value beyond their economic contributions or immigration status.

In the words of President Obama, **A budget is more than just a series of numbers on a page; it is an embodiment of our values.** Maine Council of Churches asks that the AFA and HHS committees speak to the value of the common good by not limiting GA rental assistance to three months and not cutting SNAP and TANF benefits for unemployed noncitizens with work authorization.

*Episcopal Diocese of Maine, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA),  
Religious Society of Friends, Unitarian Universalist Association, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church*

Jane Field  
Maine Council of Churches  
LD 210

Good afternoon, Senators Rotundo and Ingwersen and Representatives Gattine and Meyers, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Housing and Economic Development Committee,

My name is Jane Field, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches. Founded in 1938, the Maine Council of Churches is a nonprofit, ecumenical coalition of seven mainline Protestant member denominations, all of whom have their roots in Hebrew and Christian scripture. Our seven members have more than 400 congregations in Maine with over 50,000 parishioners in their care.

Maine Council of Churches opposes two issues being discussed as part of the Governor's biennial budget: limiting GA rental housing assistance to three (3) months in a twelve (12) month period and Part VV of LD 210, which proposes cuts to the essential support of SNAP and TANF benefits for unemployed noncitizens with work authorization. These cuts will cause devastating and irreversible harm to vulnerable populations and low-income Mainers.

Now is the worst time to slash GA rental assistance because Maine's homeless shelters are already full. GA is often used as a last resort and is one of the only rental assistance programs available to move people from homelessness into housing. Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) are presently frozen, and there are long waiting lists for Permanent Supportive Housing and BRAP. Since these vouchers are on pause, many people remain in emergency shelters or, horrifically, sleep on the streets or in parks.

It is far less expensive to use GA to keep people housed than it is to pay for shelters. The maximum GA reimbursement for a 0-bedroom heated unit in Portland is \$1,434/month. MaineHousing estimates that an average shelter bed cost is \$3,776/month. This calculates an annual savings of \$28,104 per person on GA. Keeping people housed by GA is 163% less expensive than supporting them in a homeless shelter.

Part VV proposes cuts to the essential SNAP and TANF benefits for unemployed noncitizens with work authorization. These state-funded benefits for certain noncitizens are already minimal. They are intended to bridge the gap between permission to work and finding or losing a job when people don't have the means to purchase essentials like food. Cutting them will increase food insecurity and homelessness forcing families to make the impossible choice between paying rent, covering utilities, or putting food on the table. If we share the goal of ending hunger in Maine and building a strong workforce, we must invest in the whole person, recognizing their inherent value beyond their economic contributions or immigration status.

In the words of President Obama, A budget is more than just a series of numbers on a page; it is an embodiment of our values. Maine Council of Churches asks that the AFA and HHS committees speak to the value of the common good by not limiting GA rental assistance to three months and not cutting SNAP and TANF benefits for unemployed noncitizens with work authorization.