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April 7, 2025

Re: LD 1046, An Act to Establish a 180-day State Residency Requirement for Receiving Municipal General Assistance; LD 1066, An Act to Establish Residency Requirements for Municipal General Assistance; and LD 1274, An Act to Cap State General Assistance Reimbursement to Municipalities

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM. CHOM's small staff works collaboratively to create housing enriched with services to help people overcome challenges and live successfully in the community.

My testimony is in opposition to a number of bills, all of which would make substantive changes to the General Assistance (GA) program to the detriment of vulnerable people in Maine. Changes to the safety net will have a mushrooming effect on homelessness in Maine. I testify today in opposition to the following bills:

- **LD 1046, An Act to Establish a 180-day State Residency Requirement for Receiving Municipal General Assistance.**

- The above bill would impose a 180-day residency requirement. Imposing harsh, arbitrary State residency requirements for GA will not eliminate the need for people in poverty new to Maine to access safety net resources to meet their basic needs. Without the financial assistance GA provides, many people would become homeless who otherwise would not. Having insufficient money to make ends meet is the most common reason for circumstantial homelessness. If this residency requirement was to be adopted for the GA program, people in need of minimal financial assistance to attain and maintain stable housing will have no way to do so. They will likely end up falling into homelessness, which will cost the State far more money.

- **LD 1066, An Act Regarding Limits on Municipal General Assistance Programs.**

The above bill would make the following changes to the GA Program:

- Reduce housing assistance from 9 months to 3 months within a 12-month period except for temporary housing or emergency shelter: A 3-month time limit on the safety net for people in poverty is detrimental.

The small subset of people who need assistance longer than three months will be forced out of stable housing and directly into homelessness once they meet this time limit. Landlords will be reluctant to house anyone with support of GA with a mandatory 3 month limit, eliminating our chances to house people who are homeless. This will mean that when we lack rental subsidies, which we do right now, we have no mechanism to move people out of homelessness. This will mean shelters are full and will overflow, meaning people will land outside, the worst and most expensive outcome possible.

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 at the direction of HUD 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. Our homeless response system is already overburdened – this would exacerbate a crisis situation. *Please see my attached testimony regarding Part S in the Supplemental Budget which addresses this issue in more detail.*

- Expand the circumstances in which maximum levels of assistance may not be exceeded for an applicant household for more than 30 days in a 12-month period: The Supplemental Budget in the Second Session of the 131st 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.



- Increase the period of ineligibility for an applicant who quits work or is discharged from employment due to misconduct from 120 to 180 days: Current law already disqualifies people from receiving GA if they quit work or are discharged from employment due to misconduct. This bill would increase punitive provisions by disqualifying people from GA for 180 days. Finding ways to further punish people in need of assistance is not consistent with the real work of helping people get on their feet. Clarifying General Assistance eligibility requirements seems much more prudent and would benefit the entire program.
- Require municipalities to require an otherwise eligible person who is capable of working to perform work for the municipality or participating nonprofit as a condition of receiving general assistance: The GA Program already includes Workfare requirements. The inclusion of this provision is unnecessary. Clarifying GA Workfare requirements and providing municipal GA Programs with better tools and resources to bolster their Workfare Programs seems much more prudent and would benefit the entire program.
- **LD 1274, An Act to Cap State General Assistance Reimbursement to Municipalities.**
 - This bill provides that the Department of Health and Human Services may not reimburse a single municipality for general assistance in an amount totaling more than 50% of the funds reimbursed to municipalities for general assistance in a fiscal year: The financial burden caused by the current reimbursement rate is already too much of a barrier for most municipalities to overcome, causing people to leave their communities for larger service center areas. Maine needs to increase the GA reimbursement rates from 70 to 90% now more than ever. Reducing reimbursement to 50% would have dire consequences – the costs for which will be borne by the inevitably.

Please oppose these bills. It helps none of us to keep people in poverty. The safety net is there to keep people safe, stable, and productive. GA is Maine's safety net of last resort. It protects thousands of Mainers by keeping a roof over their heads and food when they have nowhere else to turn.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.