



Testimony in Opposition of LD 1029:

“An Act to Ensure General Assistance for Housing Does Not Reduce Assistance for Other Basic Necessities and to Increase Presumptive Eligibility and State Reimbursement for General Assistance”

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Harris Van Pate. I serve as policy analyst for Maine Policy Institute. Maine Policy is a free market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to LD 1029.

This bill represents a well-meaning but unsustainable expansion of Maine’s general assistance (GA) program. It would further strain state and local budgets while eroding the program's fundamental purpose and integrity.

The Housing Requirement

First, the requirement that municipalities provide adequate housing and complete assistance for all other necessities mandates an open-ended entitlement. GA is meant to be temporary, targeted aid to individuals in immediate crisis, not a comprehensive or permanent welfare program. Elevating GA to this level effectively undermines the program's temporary nature, encourages dependency, and dilutes the ability of local governments to focus limited resources where they are most urgently needed.

The Presumptive Eligibility Expansion

Second, LD 1029 would expand presumptive eligibility for individuals in emergency shelters from 30 to 180 days—a six-fold increase. This shift weakens safeguards against abuse and undermines the program’s original design as a short-term emergency backstop. Providing guaranteed eligibility for six months without verification of continued need eliminates the incentive to seek employment, transition to self-sufficiency, or pursue other avenues of support. Such a policy threatens to turn emergency shelters into semi-permanent housing subsidized nearly indefinitely by taxpayers.

The Increased State Reimbursement Percentage

Third, the proposed increase in state reimbursement—from 70% to 90% of general GA costs, and 100% for emergency shelter expenses—may relieve some immediate pressure on municipalities. Still, it transfers the financial burden to the state without any



accompanying reforms or accountability. It incentivizes municipalities to increase spending without restraint knowing the state will now foot the bill. This is not fiscal responsibility; it is a blank check.

Maine has already seen a controversial concentration of General Assistance spending in Portland, with 73% of all general assistance spending in the state between 2019 and 2023 being in Portland.¹ This is despite Portland containing less than 5% of Maine's population. Maine should reduce the amount it subsidizes Portland's extensive general assistance program, not increase it. If Portland wishes to have a highly expanded general assistance program, they should pay for it themselves, not the rest of Maine.

Conclusion

If this bill becomes law, the unintended consequences will be substantial: greater dependency on government, less local discretion, increased taxpayer burden, and fewer resources available for those in true emergencies. Maine's GA system is a vital lifeline for individuals in temporary crisis. Undermining its short-term nature and financial boundaries would compromise its effectiveness and place even more pressure on stressed state and local budgets.

Rather than expanding GA into a quasi-permanent welfare benefit, we urge lawmakers to preserve the program's integrity by maintaining its role as a temporary emergency resource. Any reforms should be rooted in accountability, local control, and long-term independence—not a deeper reliance on state government support.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the committee to vote "Ought Not to Pass" on LD 1029. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

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<https://www.themainewire.com/2023/08/portland-spends-50-times-more-per-person-on-welfare-than-other-maine-cities-spent-73-of-all-general-assistance-dollars-since-2019-records-show/>