



Testimony in Support of LD 1066:

“An Act Regarding Limits on Municipal General Assistance Programs”

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Harris Van Pate, and 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 support of LD 1066, “An Act To Reform the Municipal General Assistance Program.”

LD 1066 offers a thoughtful and necessary rebalancing of the general assistance system in Maine. It advances meaningful reforms to help ensure these programs fulfill their intended purpose—providing short-term relief to those in genuine need—without enabling long-term dependency or encouraging abuse of taxpayer-funded benefits.

Reducing Housing Assistance Duration

The bill reduces the maximum period for housing assistance from nine to three months in a 12-month span, with exceptions for temporary or emergency shelter. This change reflects a core principle of sound welfare policy: assistance should be temporary, targeted, and transitional. Providing long-term subsidies for housing under the general assistance program risks institutionalizing dependence and disincentivizing work and personal responsibility. The three-month limit will encourage individuals to seek more permanent solutions and employment, rather than relying indefinitely on municipal resources.

Tightening Exceptions to Maximum Benefit Levels

LD 1066 also wisely limits the circumstances under which municipalities can exceed general assistance caps. This aligns with the broader need for fiscal responsibility and standardization across Maine communities. Without such safeguards, there is too much room for inconsistent interpretation and unsustainable spending growth. Establishing clear, narrow exceptions helps protect local taxpayers and ensures the safety net is sustainable and fair.

Strengthening Work Incentives

Significantly, LD 1066 increases the ineligibility period from 120 to 180 days for individuals who voluntarily leave employment or are discharged for misconduct. Maine Policy Institute has long advocated for reforms that encourage work and self-reliance. Individuals capable of working should not be rewarded for shirking employment



responsibilities. Extending the disqualification period sends a stronger message that public assistance is not a substitute for earning a living but a bridge for those in need.

Requiring Work in Exchange for Benefits

Finally, the bill requires able-bodied recipients to work for their municipality or a participating nonprofit to receive general assistance. This commonsense reform has been proven effective in other states and municipalities. It upholds the dignity of work, strengthens the social contract between the individual and the community, and ensures that assistance is not a one-way street. Work requirements are a time-tested method to encourage upward mobility and reduce long-term dependency.

Conclusion

LD 1066 is a step toward a more responsible, equitable, and sustainable general assistance program. Maine must safeguard public funds while offering temporary help to those in crisis. We must also ensure that those who can work are doing so and that public aid does not crowd out personal responsibility or community-based charity.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the committee to support LD 1066. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.