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April 7, 2025

Senator Henry Ingwersen, Chair  
Representative Michele Meyer, Chair  
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 657 - *An Act to Modify the Law Governing Municipal General Assistance by Designating Broadband Internet Access Service and Wireless Access Point Technology as Basic Necessities.*

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to provide information in opposition to LD 657, *An Act to Modify the Law Governing Municipal General Assistance by Designating Broadband Internet Access Service and Wireless Access Point Technology as Basic Necessities.*

This bill expands the definition of basic necessities in the municipal General Assistance program to include broadband internet access service and wireless access point technology.

The Department is opposed to LD 657 because it conflicts with the fundamental objectives of the GA program. While we recognize the increasing importance of internet access, especially in education and work activities, it is essential to consider the fundamental purpose and limitations of the General Assistance program when it comes to subsidizing services like broadband access. The General Assistance program is intended to assist with immediate financial aid to eligible persons who are unable to provide the basic provisions essential to maintain themselves or their families. As defined in statute, the General Assistance program “provides a specific amount and type of aid for defined needs during a limited period of time and is not intended to be a continuing “grant-in-aid” or “categorical” welfare program.” (22 M.R.S. Ch 1161, §4301(5.)). The “limited period of time” provision also points towards the purpose of the program to meet immediate and short-term needs unlike an expected ongoing need to subsidize a household’s internet or broadband service.

The General Assistance program is designed to provide essential support for individuals and families facing economic hardship. The focus of these programs is on meeting basic needs such as food and housing. These are fundamental necessities that are directly tied to an individual’s survival and overall safety. In contrast, internet access, while undeniably important, is not a basic necessity in the same way that food and shelter are.

The General Assistance program requires applicants to access available resources in order to limit or lessen the amount of public funds required to provide support. Internet access is available at no cost to the general public at local libraries, career centers, hospitals and grocery stores. Accessing this free resource allows the applicant and General Assistance administrator to prioritize an applicant’s budgeted allowance on the most critical of basic necessities and allows the program as a whole to continue

operating. As it stands, our fiscal resources are limited, with current municipal reimbursement at twice the amount budgeted for the program. It is crucial that we prioritize spending on essential benefits that directly support the basic safety of individuals and families. While internet access is important, it should not come at the expense of providing food and shelter, which are foundational to human survival and safety.

The Department opposes this bill due to the conflict between this proposal and the foundational purpose of the program to provide specifically and solely, on a temporary basis, for basic necessities such as food and shelter. Predicting any new General Assistance requests that could result from passage of this bill is not possible and may result in a minor fiscal impact, which at this time is indeterminable.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions during your deliberation of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ian Yaffe" with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Ian Yaffe, Director  
Office for Family Independence  
Maine Department of Health and Human Services