

Janet T. Mills
Governor

Sara Gagné-Holmes
Acting Commissioner



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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 1081 - *An Act to Support Access to General Assistance at Municipal General Assistance Offices and Designated Places*

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, this letter is to provide information neither for nor against LD 1081, *An Act to Support Access to General Assistance at Municipal General Assistance Offices and Designated Places*.

This bill amends the requirement for municipalities to take applications for General Assistance (GA) at any time its municipal offices are open to the public and instead allows municipalities to set hours during which an application may be accepted and processed, as long as they are at least 50% of the municipality's regular business hours. It also changes the information that must be posted at the local offices to reflect this amendment.

22 M.R.S. §4304, sub-§1 was most recently amended by the 131st Legislature through PL 2023, c. 575, §2. This change, to require that a municipality must *accept* applications for assistance during regular business hours, means that if a municipality has previously only accepted GA applications on Tuesdays but is open for business otherwise throughout the week, the municipality will now be required to accept applications on all other days it is open, not just on Tuesdays.

In 2023, the Department conducted a series of listening sessions with municipalities, Tribes, advocates, and GA recipients. One of the most common areas of feedback among recipients was to see greater uniformity across municipalities in how the program is operated. In addition, some recipients shared that limited business hours made it difficult to apply for GA.

GA Administrators have reported to the Department that they are concerned about the difficulty of maintaining coverage under the current statute, especially in smaller municipalities having limited staff resources or private spaces where a GA interview may be conducted. The Department often hears about difficulties associated with the requirement to process applications within 24 hours and to be available for emergencies after business hours, more than concerns about the business hours when applications are “accepted” alone, vs. being accepted *and* processed.

We wanted you to be aware of the above information as you consider this bill going forward. If you have any further questions during your deliberation of this bill, please feel free to contact me or the Department's Government Relations Director, Abby Stivers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ian Yaffe" with a horizontal line extending to the right.

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