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Testimony of Kiara Simonds before
the Health and Human Services Committees

in opposition to

Proposed Cuts to General Assistance in the Biennial Budget

April 7, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee.

My name is Kiara Simonds, Senior Director at the YMCA of Southern Maine. I'm here today to strongly urge you to reject the proposed reduction in General Assistance (GA) housing support to three months.

Next year, we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of our Portland men's dormitory program - a century of providing housing stability for those who need it most. Our 88-room facility is a vital steppingstone for men transitioning into permanent, independent housing. Each year, we serve over 135 individuals who would otherwise be homeless. These are not just numbers—they are real people working to rebuild their lives with dignity and purpose.

The proposed three-month limit would have an immediate and devastating impact. Currently, 32 men in our dorm - 25 current dorm members and seven approaching the threshold - would be affected by this three-month limit. These community members face returning to homelessness - erasing their hard-earned progress toward independence.

The broader cost to our community is substantial - tens of thousands of dollars per person annually. Losing housing stability leads to increased emergency services usage, worsened health outcomes, and greater strain on public systems. Studies consistently show that maintaining stable housing is more cost-effective than dealing with the cascading effects of homelessness. When individuals lose their housing, they lose access to healthcare, case managers, and the support they need to rebuild. This creates a ripple effect that harms our entire community—from our emergency services to the healthcare system.

For many of our dorm members, GA is their primary pathway to stability. These are individuals who have limited access to other assistance programs and who face significant barriers to housing. With the current housing crisis—where rents are far outpacing wages—three months is simply not enough time to secure affordable housing and rebuild the financial foundation needed to keep it.

I want to share two stories that highlight the critical role of longer-term GA support. Jessie, one of our dorm members, achieved sobriety, secured employment, and successfully transitioned into independent housing after several months of stability at our dorm. Another dorm member used GA support to stabilize his life, find work, and save enough to move into his own apartment. These successes required more than three months of support.

While our dormitory program is primarily utilized as transitional housing, it is categorized as permanent housing, not temporary shelter. That means, under the proposed policy, our dorm members would be subject to the three-month limit. This distinction is important to

understand as it directly impacts the men we serve and the long-term stability they are working so hard to achieve.

We urge you to reconsider this reduction in GA housing support. This isn't just a policy shift—it's a decision that could leave people without a path to stability and progress. This critical investment provides the foundation people need to rebuild their lives and contribute to Maine's future.

Thank you.