

April 7, 2025

Dear Senator Henry Ingwersen, Representative Michele Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Michael Beck and I am a member of Bangor City Council. The City of Bangor will be offering testimony in support on behalf of the City Council. I am offering this additional testimony on my own behalf. I am here today to strongly urge your support for LD 1178, "An Act to Expedite the Process Involving Municipalities That Illegally Move a Person to Avoid Responsibility for General Assistance Support." This bill is not just about Bangor; it's about fairness and the integrity of our state's General Assistance system.

For too long, service center communities like Bangor have shouldered a disproportionate burden in addressing homelessness and providing General Assistance. My community has seen, firsthand, the troubling practice of some municipalities moving individuals experiencing homelessness to Bangor simply to evade their own legal and moral obligations.

An October 27, 2023 Piscataquis Observer article highlighted this stark reality, detailing how police chiefs from rural Maine, some over 100 miles away, openly admit to transporting homeless individuals to Bangor due to a lack of local resources. As the Chief of Greenville stated, sending individuals nearly 100 miles to Bangor is their "best tool." This isn't a sustainable solution; it's a cost-shifting tactic that unfairly burdens our city.

While current law prohibits this practice, its enforcement is slow and ineffective. The 30-day review period and subsequent 30-day appeal mean that Bangor and other service centers can be left bearing the financial and resource strain for months while waiting for a resolution.

LD 1178 offers a crucial solution by expediting this process. Reducing the DHHS determination and appeals periods to 15 days each will provide much-needed relief. The addition of interest on unreimbursed amounts and penalties for repeat offenders will create a real disincentive for this unacceptable behavior.

Perhaps most significantly, the bill introduces a rebuttable presumption: if a municipality moves someone to another, it will be presumed they did so to avoid GA responsibility. This shifts the burden of proof and will make it far easier for

communities like Bangor to demonstrate when an illegal move has occurred.

In Fiscal Year 2024 alone, Bangor's share of General Assistance costs was over \$769,000. A significant portion of this undoubtedly supports individuals who originated elsewhere. LD 1178 will help ensure that the financial responsibility is more swiftly placed where it legally belongs, allowing Bangor to better serve its own residents and invest in vital community services.

I understand that some may have concerns about the impact on smaller municipalities. However, this bill targets the *illegal* moving of individuals with the specific intent to avoid responsibility. It is not intended to penalize legitimate support or moves made for appropriate reasons.

Passing LD 1178 is a critical step towards a fairer and more efficient General Assistance system in Maine. It will protect service center communities from bearing an undue burden, ensure that all municipalities uphold their responsibilities, and ultimately contribute to the well-being of all Maine residents. I join the City of Bangor and the rest of City Council in urging you to vote in favor of LD 1178.

Sincerely,

Michael Beck
Bangor

Additional Testimony in Support of LD 1178: An Act to Expedite the Process Involving Municipalities That Illegally Move a Person to Avoid Responsibility for General Assistance Support

My name is Michael Beck and I am a member of Bangor City Council. The City of Bangor will be offering testimony in support on behalf of the City Council. I am offering this additional testimony on my own behalf. I strongly support LD 1178, "An Act to Expedite the Process Involving Municipalities That Illegally Move a Person to Avoid Responsibility for General Assistance Support". The passage of this bill is of particular importance to service center communities like Bangor, which have long borne a disproportionate responsibility in addressing homelessness and providing General Assistance (GA) support for individuals who have often been moved from other municipalities to avoid these obligations. This testimony aims to provide the Health and Human Services Committee with a clear understanding of the challenges faced by Bangor and why the measures proposed in LD 1178 are essential for ensuring a fairer and more efficient system across the state.

The practice of some municipalities in Maine moving individuals experiencing homelessness to other towns, particularly service centers like Bangor, to evade their General Assistance responsibilities is a significant concern. This issue was brought to light in the Piscataquis Observer article published on October 27, 2023, titled "With few other options, rural police send their homeless to Bangor". The article details how police agencies from various rural parts of Maine, sometimes spanning distances of up to 150 miles, have admitted to transporting homeless individuals to Bangor. This reflects a broader pattern where larger municipalities with more robust social service infrastructure are often seen as the default destination for individuals experiencing homelessness, regardless of their origin.

The Piscataquis Observer article offers concrete examples of this concerning trend. In the article the Police Chief in Greenville stated that his department has "little to no resources available in the area for homeless people" and that sending them to Bangor, nearly 100 miles away, is their "best tool". Similarly, the Milo Police Chief acknowledged the lack of local resources and mentioned that he often arranges rides or pays for taxis to take individuals in need of housing to shelters in Bangor, which is 40 miles away. Furthermore, the Washington County Chief Deputy indicated that individuals from as far as Washington County are brought to Bangor to access specialized services for mental health issues or drug addiction. In the article Bangor City Manager Debbie Laurie confirmed that outreach workers in Bangor frequently

hear that homeless individuals are being referred to their city. This pattern is not new; Dennis Marble, the former long-time director of the Bangor Area Homeless Shelter, recalled numerous instances of sheriff's departments dropping off individuals in Bangor, highlighting that this has been a longstanding practice due to Bangor being the only city in the region with homeless shelters. While Bangor serves as a natural service hub for a vast rural region with limited resources, the act of municipalities actively moving individuals to avoid their own responsibilities places an undue burden on Bangor's resources and infrastructure.

Currently, Maine Statute Title 22, Section 4307 explicitly prohibits municipalities from moving or transporting a person into another municipality to avoid responsibility for general assistance support. The statute also outlines that a municipality found to have illegally moved or transported a person, or illegally denied assistance resulting in relocation, shall reimburse twice the amount of assistance to the municipality that provided the support. Despite this existing legal framework, the practice continues, suggesting inefficiencies or challenges in the enforcement and determination process. One significant challenge is the time frame allotted to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to determine if a municipality has acted illegally, which is currently 30 working days. This lengthy period leaves service centers like Bangor to shoulder the immediate financial and resource burden while waiting for a determination. Adding to this delay is the 30-day appeals period following the DHHS determination. This extended timeline can prolong the uncertainty and financial strain on the receiving municipality for nearly two months or more before a resolution and potential reimbursement are reached. Furthermore, the current expectation that municipalities should first attempt to resolve these issues amongst themselves before involving DHHS can be ineffective, particularly when the originating municipality denies any wrongdoing. This initial step places an additional administrative burden on the service center. The fact that Bangor's public health director indicated that the reported 159 calls to the state likely represent an undercount of actual incidents suggests that many instances of cost-shifting may go unaddressed due to the cumbersome initial steps required for formal complaint.

LD 1178 directly addresses these inefficiencies by proposing several key changes to expedite the process. The bill seeks to decrease the period for DHHS to make a determination of illegal moving from 30 to 15 working days. This halving of the initial review period will allow for a much quicker resolution and potential reimbursement for communities like Bangor. Similarly, the bill aims to reduce the appeals period from 30 to 15 days after the DHHS determination. This further accelerates the timeline for final resolution, minimizing the period of uncertainty and financial burden on the receiving

municipality. Recognizing the financial impact of these situations, LD 1178 also proposes that the offending municipality pay interest on any unreimbursed amounts. This provision introduces a financial disincentive for municipalities engaging in illegal moving and encourages prompt reimbursement. To address repeat offenders, the bill includes a penalty of up to \$10,000 for any municipality found to have committed a similar violation within a 12-month period. This significant penalty underscores the seriousness of the issue and aims to deter municipalities from repeatedly shifting their responsibilities. Perhaps most significantly, LD 1178 introduces a rebuttable presumption that if a municipality moves a person to another municipality, it did so to avoid responsibility for General Assistance support. This crucial change shifts the burden of proof, making it easier for service centers like Bangor to demonstrate that an illegal move likely occurred, requiring the originating municipality to provide evidence to the contrary.

The expedited process outlined in LD 1178 offers substantial benefits for Bangor and other service center communities throughout Maine. By ensuring a fairer allocation of responsibility for General Assistance support, the bill directly addresses the core issue of cost-shifting. The quicker determination and resolution process will ensure that the financial burden is more swiftly placed back on the municipality legally obligated to provide assistance, preventing service centers from disproportionately absorbing these costs for extended periods. This will lead to a significant reduction in the strain on Bangor's General Assistance resources, social services, and overall community well-being.

Bangor's financial commitment to its General Assistance program is considerable. In Fiscal Year 2024, the city's share of the total GA cost was \$769,309.29, and in FY 2023, it was \$323,254. A portion of these costs is undoubtedly attributable to providing assistance to individuals who have been moved to Bangor from other municipalities. By expediting the process for determining responsibility and ensuring reimbursement, LD 1178 will help alleviate this financial strain, allowing Bangor to better allocate its resources to serve its own residents and invest in other crucial community services. Beyond direct financial assistance, Bangor's police department handles a significant volume of calls related to individuals experiencing homelessness. The city has also proactively established a Homeless Outreach Program to address the growing crisis. These efforts, while commendable, are stretched further when the city is burdened with supporting individuals whose origin lies elsewhere. A more equitable system, facilitated by LD 1178, will contribute to the overall well-being of the community by ensuring that resources are not disproportionately depleted due to the actions of other municipalities.

Fiscal Year	Total Number of Individuals Assisted	City Share of Total GA Cost	City Share of Shelter-Specific Expenditure
2024	1,203	\$769,309.29	\$66,761.72
2023	711	\$323,254.00	\$61,730.00
2022	673	\$321,227.00	\$16,479.00
2021	964	\$281,343.00	\$24,700.00
2020	1,674	\$447,040.00	\$41,082.00
2019	1,569	\$507,354.00	\$45,094.00

Note: Data from <https://bangormaine.gov/509/Homelessness-Response>

The Health and Human Services Committee may have some concerns regarding LD 1178. One potential concern could be the financial impact on smaller, rural municipalities with limited administrative capacity due to the reduced timelines and increased penalties. However, it is important to emphasize that this bill targets the *illegal* moving of individuals with the specific intent to avoid General Assistance responsibilities. Municipalities that are genuinely providing support or facilitating moves for legitimate reasons, rather than to evade their obligations, should not be unduly affected. The focus is on deterring intentional cost-shifting. Another concern might revolve around the definition of "illegally move" and the fair application of the rebuttable presumption. The existing statute already provides a legal basis by prohibiting the movement of individuals to avoid GA responsibility. LD 1178 builds upon this foundation. The rebuttable presumption is not an absolute judgment; municipalities will have the opportunity to present evidence demonstrating that a move was conducted for reasons other than evading GA costs, such as at the request of the individual to be closer to family or employment opportunities. Finally, there might be a concern about the potential increase in administrative burden on the DHHS due to the shorter timelines for determination. While there might be an initial increase in workload, the expedited process is likely to lead to quicker resolutions and potentially fewer prolonged disputes in the long run. Furthermore, the penalties for violations could incentivize greater compliance, ultimately reducing the overall number

of cases requiring DHHS intervention.

In conclusion, Bangor and other service center communities in Maine face significant challenges due to the practice of municipalities illegally moving individuals to avoid their General Assistance responsibilities. LD 1178 offers a critical step forward in addressing this issue by expediting the process for determination and resolution. The proposed changes will lead to a fairer allocation of responsibility, reduce the strain on vital resources in communities like Bangor, and promote overall community well-being. I strongly urge the passage of LD 1178 to ensure a more equitable and just system for all municipalities and residents of Maine.

Sincerely,

Michael Beck
Bangor

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