



## TOWN OF FREEPORT, MAINE

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**Testimony of Sophia L. Wilson in support of LD 1081**  
***"An Act to Support Access to General Assistance at Municipal General Assistance Offices***  
***and Designated Places"***  
**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Sophie Wilson, and I am honored to serve the Town Freeport as its Town Manager. I am here to express my support for LD 1081, which addresses critical issues within the General Assistance (GA) program.

For several years, Freeport's GA program was administered by Freeport Community Services. However, late last spring, the organization determined that they no longer had the capacity to effectively provide this service and returned GA back to the Town. Like many municipalities in Maine, Freeport works diligently to limit staffing, meaning most positions fill multiple roles. Our GA monthly application rate fluctuates between 1 and 18 per month, with varying degrees of complexity. We lack a dedicated GA office or a regularly available private conference area at Town Hall.

I have been a Town Manager for nearly 25 years, the last 16 months in Freeport, and have filled GA roles throughout that tenure, except for my first few months in Freeport. While I support many of the changes the Legislature made to GA program rules last year, I am concerned with the change from towns being required to establish reasonable hours to accept non-emergency GA applications to the current mandate that they must be accepted anytime Town Hall is open.

The rules have long held that administrators have 24 hours to process and issue a decision on non-emergency GA applications. However, under the changed rules, towns are required to accept applications whenever Town Hall is open and process the application within 24 hours (even if it is outside of normal business hours). We simply do not have the staffing to support accepting and processing applications effectively at all times. A non-emergency application that arrives in the final minutes of the last day of the workweek must be processed within 24 hours, necessitating staff to work beyond their scheduled hours.

In an effort to mitigate the cost of municipal services to property taxpayers, staff in small to mid-sized communities often wear many hats. GA is an important safety net in Maine communities. Allowing municipal officials to examine their community's needs and establish hours for non-emergency GA

The Town of Freeport is an equal opportunity employer and service provider that celebrates diversity and is committed to creating an inclusive environment for our employees and those we serve.

applications creates a more orderly and higher quality service for our residents and taxpayers as we can plan and staff accordingly in these designated hours.

By supporting LD 1081, we are taking a significant step towards ensuring that all residents of Maine, regardless of their circumstances, have access to the support they need to maintain their health, safety, and dignity. This bill aligns with our community values of compassion, inclusivity, and support for one another.

I urge the Committee to consider the positive impact that LD 1081 will have on our communities and to vote in favor of this important legislation. Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your continued commitment to serving the people of Maine.