

Andrew Lardie
Tedford Housing
LD 1029

April 7, 2025

Senator Henry Ingwersen,
Representative Michelle Meyer
Committee on Health & Human Services
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: Testimony in favor of LD 1029, An Act to Ensure General Assistance for Housing Does Not Reduce Assistance for Other Basic Necessities, and to Increase Presumptive Eligibility and State Reimbursement for General Assistance.

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Andrew Lardie, and I'm Executive Director at Tedford Housing, an anti-homelessness agency based in Brunswick and serving Maine's southern midcoast region.

I'm writing to support LD 1029: An Act to Ensure General Assistance for Housing Does Not Reduce Assistance for Other Basic Necessities, and to Increase Presumptive Eligibility and State Reimbursement for General Assistance.

In the experience of Tedford Housing and the Mainers we serve, General Assistance does not function as intended. This bill would address two of the causes of that dysfunction.

First, the current 30% local cost burden means that Towns with more impoverished residents need to somehow extract more wealth from their residents to fund GA. As a protective measure, and/or because their leadership is philosophically opposed to welfare, some towns use their administrative discretion to make the program even more difficult to access than statute does. For example, required in-person meetings for applicants, combined with very few scheduled hours offered by the GA administrator.

Reforming the funding burden would help make GA work by shifting the program's dependence away from the blunt instrument of property tax, and increasing access to a variety of progressive underwriting sources as determined by the State. Towns would have less incentive to hamper the program, and some municipalities might make GA easier to access.

A second reason General Assistance does not work is that payments are too low and too short-lived to stabilize households. At Tedford, our shelter guests and outreach clients are always poor, usually underserved in terms of education and healthcare, psychologically degraded by chronic stress, and often disabled. Case managers rightly prioritize helping clients access basic services and support that will allow them to get out of the shelter and into stable housing. GA support is so modest and fleeting that a Case Manager who could assist a guest or client in applying, may rightly reason that the likely benefit to the client is insufficient to justify the outlay of scarce staff resources. For these people, Tedford is the basic needs safety net and GA is not a resource at all. For agencies like Tedford who provide shelter and food without reimbursement, fiscal pressure grows.

Tedford is exploring whether/how we can launch an effort to 'chase' GA funds, navigating dozens of unique processes among the many towns whose residents access our services. Improving the alignment of reimbursements with actual basic needs costs would go some way toward justifying the considerable time our staff would have to dedicate to helping our guests & clients navigate these GA processes.

But most of all, reforming GA reimbursement rates could restore the program to its

purpose: ensuring that Mainers who are the most underserved and vulnerable have access to basic necessities, and a chance at a healthy future.

I urge you to support LD 1029. Thank you for your consideration and your service.

Thank you,
Andrew Lardie
Executive Director
Tedford Housing