



Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services 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

Greetings, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Health and Human Services. My name is Jared Gay, and I am the Director of Public Policy & Advocacy at United Way of Southern Maine. This testimony is on behalf of all seven United Ways of Maine.

United Ways across Maine are committed to supporting individuals and families who are working hard, oftentimes working multiple jobs, yet still struggling to make enough income to meet their most basic needs. These individuals are part of what we call ALICE—Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. ALICE households earn above the federal poverty level but below the cost of living in their communities. They are essential workers—child care providers, health aides, grocery clerks—who hold our communities together, but who are often one emergency away from crisis.

LD 1029 directly responds to the urgent needs of ALICE Mainers by modernizing Maine’s General Assistance (GA) program. Today, the rising cost of housing is forcing far too many people to choose between paying rent and affording groceries or prescription medication. This bill recognizes that tradeoff should never be necessary. It ensures that GA calculations consider both housing and other essential needs—recognizing that a roof over one’s head means little without food in the fridge or medication in hand.

The bill also wisely extends the presumptive eligibility window from 30 to 180 days for individuals in emergency shelters. For people experiencing homelessness—many of whom are ALICE individuals who simply couldn’t keep up with rising rents—this extension provides critical breathing room. It allows shelter staff to focus on helping people transition into stable housing, rather than rushing to prove eligibility or fill out paperwork during a moment of crisis.

Perhaps most significantly, LD 1029 increases the state’s reimbursement rate to municipalities from 70% to 90%, and provides 100% reimbursement for emergency shelter costs. Raising the reimbursement rate to 90% is one of the most impactful steps we can

take to ensure people can access help in the communities they call home. Right now, the financial strain of the current reimbursement structure makes it difficult for many municipalities to offer meaningful support, pushing people to leave their towns in search of help in larger service hubs. At the same time, without the additional reforms included in this bill, emergency shelters across Maine will continue to be overwhelmed, underfunded, and at risk of closing their doors.

For the ALICE population, GA is often the last thread of the safety net—one that too often frays under outdated formulas and underfunded systems. LD 1029 strengthens that net. It makes Maine's response to poverty more compassionate, more effective, and more reflective of the economic realities people face today.

We urge you to vote in favor of LD 1029 and help ensure that all Mainers—especially ALICE families—can access the support they need to stay safe, healthy, and housed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.