



April 28, 2025

Re: LD 978, An Act to Increase General Assistance Reimbursement for Municipalities and Indian Tribes, with significant reference to 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 Members of the Joint Standing Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Brian Townsend, and I am the Executive Director of Commonspace. Commonspace offers programs for adults and families experiencing challenges related to homelessness, substance use, mental health, trauma, and legal system involvement in Greater Portland and Lincoln and Sagadahoc Counties. Our programs include supportive housing, housing navigation, community recovery centers, jail reentry, harm reduction and recovery services, and emergency food and shelter programs,

I am testifying in strong support of LD 978, in conjunction with LD 1029. The essential components of these bills, taken together, will strengthen local responses to financial emergencies experienced by individuals and families, while simultaneously supporting and sustaining the essential work of emergency shelter and housing navigation teams.

With our programs in the mid-coast and in Portland, Commonspace has a front row seat for the current and varied challenges faced across a diverse spectrum of municipalities, as they seek to respond to individuals and families experiencing financial emergencies. Officials in small towns in the mid-coast are commonly unable to fulfill meeting their current proportion of GA costs, while simultaneously operating within service areas experiencing a deficit of available shelter, food, and service options. We have witnessed it numerous times: someone affiliated with one of our mid-coast programs is directed (with or without transportation support) to get to Portland, to present at the Homeless Services Center and at the Portland GA office for help. The City of Portland continues to embrace its role as Maine's service hub, and reliably stretches its existing resources to accommodate people in need arriving daily from towns across the state.

LD 978 if in conjunction with LD 1029 will support municipalities and community organizations across the state with providing essential shelter, food and housing resources for individuals and families, increasing opportunities to retain help-seeking households within their communities, support networks, school systems, and extended families. The bill will also support the City of Portland's current and ongoing role as the provider of emergency shelter and housing supports for Maine, as it will shift the proportion of State-covered GA costs back to a level that more

accurately represents the role the City plays in supporting households experiencing emergencies across the entire state.

If LD 978 and LD 1029 were combined, it would greatly extend and enhance the community-supporting benefits of LD 978. Together, between ensuring that local GA offices can support households not only with emergency shelter and housing but with essential food security and medical health needs, extending the presumptive eligibility window from 30 to 180 days, and shifting the State's reimbursement rate to 90%, LD 978, fused thoughtfully with LD 1029, will make Maine households and communities stronger and healthier, and would absolutely be an investment in our collective future that validates the associated costs.

Maine takes care of its own, and LD 978 with LD 1029 represents that fact as firmly as anything we have seen. Please support the passage of these essential GA revisions.

Sincerely,

*Brian Townsend*

Brian Townsend, Executive Director

Commonspace