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April 28, 2025

Re: LD 978, An Act to Increase General Assistance Reimbursement for Municipalities and Indian Tribes

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM. CHOM creates housing and inclusive communities for vulnerable populations in Maine.

I am testifying in strong support of LD 978, An Act to Increase General Assistance Reimbursement for Municipalities and Indian Tribes. *This bill increases, from 70% to 90%, the amount of state reimbursement for the costs of general assistance incurred by each municipality and Indian tribe. The bill incrementally increases state reimbursement, reaching 90% of the direct costs incurred by that municipality or tribe by July 1, 2030, for the 6 municipalities or Indian tribes receiving the highest amount of state reimbursement for the period beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2025. For other municipalities and tribes, it increases state reimbursement to 90% of the direct costs incurred by that municipality or tribe for costs incurred on or after July 1, 2026.*

Increasing the reimbursement rate to 90% is one of the most important moves this Legislature can make to ensure that people are served within their home communities.

The financial burden caused by the current reimbursement rate is too much of a barrier for most municipalities to overcome, causing people to leave their communities for larger service center areas.

LD 978 would accomplish increasing the GA reimbursement rate to 90% on 7/1/26 for most municipalities, and incrementally over the next five years for the six municipalities receiving the highest amount of state reimbursement. This makes good sense.

However, I urge the Committee to either:

- Insert the language of this bill regarding GA reimbursement into 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*, heard by this Committee this session. Or,
- Amend LD 1029 to mimic the language pertaining to GA reimbursement and support both bills.

Increasing GA reimbursement to 90% is critical, but Maine will continue to see emergency shelters remain full or over capacity, underfunded, and in jeopardy of closure unless the other two provisions of LD 1029 are implemented.

Extending presumptive eligibility would allow payment for emergency shelter for people in need. Shelters have lacked resources to maintain sufficient capacity and staffing for years. They are in crisis, with large annual deficits – some as high as \$855,000. Without additional funding allocations emergency shelters in Maine will close – some imminently. For Maine to safely meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness, we must have an adequately funded shelter system – it is the foundation of our homeless service system. Increasing the period of presumptive eligibility will allow shelters to effectively bill General Assistance for shelter overnight stays. The current 30-day presumptive eligibility period is labor intensive, requiring the hiring of staff to facilitate redundant (and unnecessary) eligibility checks on people in an obvious homelessness crisis. Extending the presumptive eligibility period would solve this and make this a reasonable shelter funding mechanism. And it would allow shelter staff across Maine to focus on housing people, their highest and best purpose.



GA is Maine's safety net of last resort. It protects thousands of Mainers by keeping a roof over their head when they have nowhere else to turn. Please pass LD 978 as well as LD 1029 or combine the two bills into one and pass that. This would improve and enhance General Assistance so we can ensure Maine's most vulnerable populations have access to vital safety net resources in their home communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.