



Board Members

Jennifer Putnam
Executive Director, Waypoint
Board President

Bill Shanahan
Co-Founder & Senior Advisor, Evernorth
Board Treasurer

Gunnar Hubbard
FAIA, LEED Fellow, Climate-Forward
Catalyst for the AEC Industry
Board Secretary

David Birkhahn
Vice President, TD Bank

Elizabeth Boepple
Partner, Murray, Plumb, & Murray

Cheryl Harkins
Advocate, Homeless Voices for Justice

Ninette Irabaruta
Senior Director, Community Engagement
& Outreach United Way of Southern ME

Chip Newell
Principal, The NewHeight Group

Luc Nya
Mental Health Program Coordinator
OCFS/Corrections Liaison, Maine DHHS

Angela Perkins
Westbrook Resident

Thomas Ptacek
Advocate, Portland Resident

Jennifer Rottmann
Deputy Director/CFO, The Genesis Fund

John Ryan
Co-Founder and Board Chair,
Wright-Ryan Construction

Aaron Shapiro
Retired Community Development
Director, Cumberland County

Kimberly Twitchell
Senior Director of Affordable Housing,
NBT Bank

Staff Contacts

Cullen Ryan
Executive Director

Samantha Messick
Operations Director

Vickey Merrill
Advocacy Director

Chris Harmon
Finance Director

Jenny Jimino
Office Manager

Bree LaCasse
Development Director

Brian Kilgallen
Development Officer

Sarah Gaba
Asset Management Director

Meredith Smith
Supportive Housing Manager

Sarah Derosier
Asset Manager

Sam Lowry
Compliance Manager

May 19, 2025

Re: LD 1959, An Act to Prohibit the Department of Health and Human Services from Reducing General Assistance Reimbursement Maximums for Payment of Costs of Providing Emergency Shelter

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 (CHOM). I also co-Chair the Maine Homeless Policy Committee which designed this bill.

I am testifying in strong support of LD 1959, An Act to Prohibit the Department of Health and Human Services from Reducing General Assistance Reimbursement Maximums for Payment of Costs of Providing Emergency Shelter. *This bill provides that, retroactive to July 1, 2023, the maximum level of municipal general assistance for emergency shelter is the actual cost of providing emergency shelter services. It prohibits the Department of Health and Human Services from adopting any rule reducing or otherwise restricting maximum levels of municipal general assistance for providing emergency shelter or any rule establishing maximum time periods for eligibility for emergency housing assistance that are more restrictive than limits established in the laws governing municipal general assistance.*

This bill would importantly correct an unfortunate situation recently created by the Department of Health and Human Services promulgating Rules that have proven to have negative financial consequences to Maine's homeless shelter system – specifically in our larger service-center areas such as Portland and Bangor.

Proposed GA Rule #26, which was put out for public comment at the end of 2024, made several changes to the General Assistance (GA) Program. The Rule included language stating that the 0-bedroom heated rate will be used for shelter reimbursement – a major substantive change to the way in which shelters are reimbursed. It is important to note that this specific change was not included LD 1732, the enacted legislation that this Rule aimed to implement.

Prior to this Rule change, there had been flexibility in order to meet shelters' needs. This flexibility allowed GA to reimburse shelters at rates higher than the 0-bedroom heated rate. This flexibility was removed through this Rule change, to the financial detriment of emergency shelters in Maine.

Previously the City of Portland GA Program could pay up to the GA maximum, which is higher than the 0-bedroom heated rate. Once implemented, this major change immediately affected shelter budgets that utilize GA for bed-night reimbursement across the state, with large projected net operating losses. At a time when shelters are closing or on the brink of closure across the state, these additional financial losses would be detrimental for our shelter system.

The City of Portland has stated that this Rule Change will have a significant adverse financial effect, costing the City \$2.2 million for the remainder of the current fiscal year (from the time the Rule went into effect until 6/30/25) – with an ongoing \$4.4 Million annual net loss. This is for the City of Portland alone. More direct effects will be felt in Bangor, which also utilizes GA to pay for shelter stays. Portland and Bangor have the largest concentrations of homeless populations in the state. The secondary effects will be felt in shelters across all parts of the state, which have little recourse but to turn people away when they reach the capacity. They are at or beyond capacity now. Shelters across the state are already facing significant financial burdens. York County Shelter Program's adult shelter has already closed – net losses such as this could close more shelter doors. This means that people will land outside in tents or encampments, a situation that produces very poor outcomes and can lead to complicated health implications, like the spread of communicable diseases that are very expensive to treat.



This portion of GA Rule #26 was not routine technical, as there were clear fiscal effects, and should have been considered major substantive in order to receive proper Legislative review and action prior to adoption. Please pass LD 1959 to correct this, restore adequate GA reimbursement for emergency shelters, and ensure guardrails are in place to protect the integrity of the laws that govern General Assistance. Not doing so will continue to create financial hardships for emergency shelters and will serve to negatively affect our most vulnerable population's ability to survive.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.