

MAINE SERVICE CENTERS COALITION

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Testimony of the Maine Service Centers Coalition LD 1996, An Act to Clarify Responsibilities of the State in the Laws Governing General Assistance

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, the Maine Service Centers Coalition is submitting testimony in opposition to LD 1996, An Act to Clarify Responsibilities of the State in the Laws Governing General Assistance.

The Maine Service Centers Coalition, comprised of 27 towns and cities across the state, articulates the importance of healthy and thriving service center communities, advocates for public policy that supports and contributes to the economic and social viability of our communities, and collaborates with municipal officials, legislators, state agencies and nonprofits to pursue quality of life for all who live and work in our state.

In the 131st Legislature, Representative Meyer introduced LD 1732, legislation recognizing the growing need for the state's General Assistance program as well as "the demand on the municipal staff who administer the program." The bill, she said, "seeks a solution that both protects the state's most vulnerable and supports the communities that implement the program." One of the bill's proposals "to further support effective administration of the program" would "create a statewide database to track program applicants and expenses so that we can make the best use of our resources."

The Health and Human Service Committee unanimously passed LD 1732 with the provision the Department of Health and Human Services "provide overseers access to an Internet-based, real-time database containing the information necessary to properly determine an applicant's eligibility" for the state's GA program beginning July 1, 2025. The legislation was enacted by both Chambers and became law on March 27, 2024.

Our Coalition highlights Representative Meyer's words as they ring even truer today – the GA program is vital and growing, and pressures on our staffs continue to increase. An accessible database remains a critical, and frequently requested, tool that our cities and towns seek in order to: 1) administer the state's GA program more efficiently and cost-effectively; and 2) alleviate some of the strain placed on our already stretched personnel and finances.

The Maine Service Centers Coalition respectfully urges you to join us in opposing LD 1996 and sustaining the law requiring the development of a statewide database for the General Assistance program.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.