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*Testimony of Rep. Michele Meyer presenting*

## **LD 1732, An Act to Expand the General Assistance Program**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services*

Good morning, esteemed colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee for Health and Human Services I am Rep Michele Meyer, serving Southern Maine's District 150, Eliot and parts of Kittery and South Berwick I am very pleased to introduce **LD 1732, An Act to Expand the General Assistance Program**

Since its inception in 1820, the General Assistance Program has historically functioned as a program of last resort, available to assist when all other avenues have been exhausted, so as to ensure those in need do not slip through the cracks Today, GA is more necessary than ever before, serving as a supplement when other state and federal programs have not proved adequate to ensure that such basic needs as food, shelter and medications are met

As this need has grown, so too has the demand on the municipal staff who administer the program LD 1732 seeks a solution that both protects the state's most vulnerable and supports the communities that implement the program The bill aims to do so by increasing accountability, funding and resources

With respect to accountability, LD 1732 requires municipal administrators to receive training within 120 days of appointment or election, offered by the state at no cost to the municipality The bill also requires communities to accept applications throughout its normal business hours, and it amends the municipalities of responsibility statutes These changes will provide municipalities with the tools necessary to effectively implement the program and ensure that the costs of doing so are more equitably shared

LD 1732 increases funding for both the aid provided and for the costs of administration As proposed, the bill increases reimbursement for the direct aid provided from 70% to 90% The bill provides 100% reimbursement for the amount of aid that exceeds the maximum levels of reimbursement, if required by rule or statute The bill also seeks to support a portion of the costs associated with administering the program, including covering 100% of the cost of interpreter services

Additionally, the bill would provide the necessary resources to ensure implementation of the law by requiring that the state officials who advise local level administration receive adequate training, are available to provide technical assistance to municipal officials around the clock, and provide timely responses when question are posed to them

Finally, to further support effective administration of the program, the bill directs the Department of Health and Human Services to create a statewide database to track program applicants and expenses so that we can make the best use of our resources

I look forward to working with all of you to find a path forward that both serves those in need of a helping hand and supports our local officials

Thank you for your consideration