



Honorable Senator Baldacci and Representative Meyer and the members of the Health and Human Services Committee-

My name is Rev Christine Dyke, I am the Lead Minister at First Parish Church UCC in Gorham I am also a board member of Greater Portland Family Promise

This summer First Parish Church will be converting a floor of our building into housing for asylum seeking families through the Long-Term Solutions Grant provided for by the Legislature Families will use General Assistance to pay for their food and a portion of their rent

Family Promise helps families to apply for and access public benefits programs, housing and food resources and they know the General Assistance program inside and out

I am here today to testify in support LD 1426, An Act to Secure Housing for the Most Vulnerable Maine Residents by Amending the Laws Governing Municipal General Assistance, LD 1664, An Act to Increase Reimbursement Under the General Assistance Program, and LD 1675 An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the General Assistance Program Regarding Eligibility, Housing Assistance and State Reimbursement and to Establish a Working Group I am in support of these three bills because they help to increase access to General Assistance and help to simplify the program

We want bolster and strengthen new arrivals, not increase their stress and anxiety putting them and their families at a disadvantage

People are better able to fully participate in their communities and thrive when they have adequate shelter, nutrition, and health care General Assistance invests in people and their wellbeing as they work towards financial security General Assistance is one of the many supports that helps Mainers to achieve sustainable independence

I am in favor of the proposed improvements to the General Assistance program The General Assistance reimbursement rates are currently too low and don't match the rental rates throughout the state Many landlords don't accept GA vouchers because the reimbursement rate is not high enough The maximum level of assistance should be the same amount as a section 8 voucher so that we level the playing field and give more families access to the housing that they deserve.

While First Parish will be requesting a rent far below section 8 vouchers, our goal with the program is to be an interim place of housing until an apartment can be secured

Additionally, every town in Maine should be reimbursed 90% of the money they spend for GA Many municipalities limit the amount of General Assistance funds that they grant because they aren't reimbursed enough from the state As a first-time homeowner in Gorham I understand that an individual town or city cannot bear the costs on their own, but together as a state we can

support those municipalities that have the needed resources for asylum seeking families given their statutory restrictions on earning income through employment. Those resources include public transportation and English Language Learner classes in the schools. I am proud to say that Gorham has both resources. I am also in favor of families only needing to reapply or recertify for General Assistance every 6-12 months to streamline and simplify the process. Then they can focus on completing their asylum applications.

Finally, I am in favor of requiring that municipalities complete a training on the requirements of the General Assistance program to support a more uniform and equal program implementation.

I am here to testify against LD 182, LD 268, and LD 454, these three bills impose harmful restrictions on the General Assistance program such as residency requirements, time limits and other restrictions that prevent people from having access to housing and food.

All Mainers want and need to be able to put a roof over our heads, food on our tables, and pay for other essentials like medication and diapers.

I have run quite a few food pantries in my career, and am astounded by the amount of time, energy, and resources, such as gas money, we require of people living in poverty, just to provide themselves and their family with adequate nutrition. Providing nutritional support through GA allows families to access food when they need it, rather than when it is convenient for food pantries and their volunteers to supply it.

When people have stable housing, adequate nutrition, and good health, they are better able to consistently participate in work. Access to housing and food enhances the wellbeing of Mainers and reduces social service costs by providing targeted health and social services and helps end the cycle of poverty for families. While families wait to receive their work authorization, they are working on furthering their education and increasing their skills, attending school, completing certificate and higher education degree programs.

I support the bills that simplify and increase access to General Assistance. I do not support restrictions and timelines that make it harder for people to access GA and further impact the homelessness crises that we are facing here in the State of Maine.

People need access to housing, food and other basic needs to be able to provide for themselves and their families. The goal is to increase access to GA and simplify the program and not add further constraints and restrictions. Any additional rules, penalties, residency requirements and time limits just make it harder for families to access this essential program that supports families on the road to self-sufficiency.

I urge you to vote in support of the three separate bills (LD 1426, LD 1664, LD 1675) that increase access to General Assistance or to vote in support of one combined bill that incorporates positive changes and improvements to this essential program.

Thank you