

prosperityme

175 Lancaster Street · Suite 216 · Portland, ME 04101
P.O Box 8013 · Portland, ME 04104
207-797-7890 · prosperityme.org

Dear member of the appropriations and Financial Affairs committee

My Name is Claude Rwaganje. I wear multiple hats; I am president of the city council In Westbrook, and founder and Executive Director of ProsperityME.

Our agency has been helping New Mainers for the past 16 years and more recently involved in housing navigation services in the past 4 years. ProsperityME has served more than 10,000 individuals to date by providing financial education and 1:1 financial coaching, workforce development, scholarships for asylum seekers, housing navigation, and other housing services.

I am here to testify in opposition to the portion of the supplemental budget under section S-1. 22 MRSA §4308, sub-§1-A, as enacted by PL 2011, c. 655, Pt. R, §2, amended to read: 1-A. Limit on housing assistance. Except as provided in subsections 1B, and 2, housing assistance provided pursuant to this chapter is limited to a maximum of 3 months in a 12-month period per household, except for temporary housing and emergency shelters, defined by the Department by rule during the period from July 1, 2012, to June 30, 2013.

ProsperityME has supported over 250 people who were homeless, living in transitional shelters, hotels and other unstable housing situations to gain safe and permanent housing in the last 2 years. Out of this number 207 gained successful employment after their placement into long term housing. More than half have not returned for any General Assistance.

Maine needs workers and we can't have a workforce without housing stability. The cut will create more homelessness. New Mainers utilize assistance while waiting for their work authorization which can take up to 12 months. The cut will create more homelessness and will make it difficult for us to place individuals from the shelter into permanent housing. Landlords will not engage with providers unless they know that at least 12-month funding is available.

Housing stability through GA should be viewed as an investment more than seeing it as a welfare. These individuals will be taxpayers and support our workforce need as well as our economy.

We urge you to make a sound decision and prevent the cut to housing. Saving money now will create a crisis for many families, including children, that will be hard to fix later.

This section, if approved, will reverse housing stability, create more homelessness, and cost taxpayers more.