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MMA Testimony on Several General Assistance Related Bills April 7, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Service Committee, my name is Kate Dufour, and I submitting testimony for two reasons.

First, to encourage members of the committee to review the testimony submitted by my colleague, Amanda Campbell, which details the positions on several of the General Assistance program bills being heard today, which were established by members of MMA's Legislative Policy Committee.

Second, to request that throughout the discussions on these issues that consideration is given to the capacities of our varied communities; the needs of our most vulnerable residents; and the state resources necessary to properly enforce the program's requirements and standards.

The concern among our members is best illustrated in two bills seeking to resolve the "who pays" question by expressing misgivings regarding how the GA program is administration in certain communities based simply on their capacity and role in the larger intergovernmental structure. LD 1178, *An Act to Expedite the Process Involving Municipalities that Illegally Move a Person to Avoid Responsibility for General Assistance Support*, creates a presumption of a violation of state law when a person who previously resided in one community applies for assistance in other, and LD 1274, *An Act to Cap State General Assistance Reimbursement to Municipalities*, seeking to cap the amount of state reimbursement to communities based on the amount of aid statutorily required to be provided.

With respect to LD 1274, it is important to remember that the state's largest service centers, primarily Bangor, Lewiston and Portland, receive the largest amount of state reimbursement for GA expenses because they serve the greatest number of people. Many Maine residents visit service center communities because of their restaurants, cultural and entertainment opportunities, as well as to obtain basic necessities such as food and fuel. These communities also host important service providers, such as hospitals, clinics, and shelters, which often are exempt from paying property taxes in exchange for providing vital services. Additionally, the proposal to cap reimbursement for mandated expenses punishes service center communities for adhering to the law and unfairly and unnecessarily shifting greater burdens on the property owners in those communities.

On the flipside, it is equally unfair to suggest that a community that relocates a resident to another community is doing so to avoid the cost associated with providing assistance. If that is the case, then the

state should do a better job of enforcing its laws, which were amended last year to expand the cost share requirements that are in place when an individual relocates to another community to access desired or needed resources. Not all communities have access to needed services within their borders, and GA applicants and recipients retain the right to reside in a community that suits their needs, as we all do. Training, education and enforcement should take precedence over the assessment of fines and leveraging presumptions of impropriety

Again, in the process of tweaking or making wholesale amendments to the GA program, municipal officials simply ask that all who are involved, including recipients, administrators and taxpayers, are treated fairly and that changes are thoughtful and informed.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the need for increased state reimbursement, as proposed in LD 453, in recognition that cost of administration the GA program is an expense that is borne solely by the property taxpayers. Additionally, our members greatly appreciated the fix found in LD 1081, *An Act to Support Access to General Assistance at Municipal General Assistance Offices and Designated Places*, which provides constructive clarity to the application process and allowance of municipal officials to address both the need so applicants and municipal staff administering the GA program.

Thank you for considering the municipal perspective on these bills.