



April 7, 2025

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Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Annika Moore, and I am the Advocacy Team Leader at Preble Street. The mission of Preble Street is to provide accessible, barrier-free services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty and to advocate for solutions to these problems. Preble Street operates 16 programs throughout Maine, and its staff works daily alongside hundreds of individuals and families who struggle with housing insecurity.

Preble Street supports LD 1029, An Act to Ensure General Assistance for Housing Does Not Reduce Assistance for Other Basic Necessities and to Increase Presumptive Eligibility and State Reimbursement for General Assistance. LD 1029 enables individuals and families facing housing insecurity to access the support they need while remaining in their home communities. By increasing the General Assistance (GA) reimbursement rate to 90%, this bill alleviates the financial burden on municipalities and tribes, enabling them to provide emergency assistance to their residents. This reimbursement change alone will go a long way in creating a more equitable and universal General Assistance policy across the state of Maine; for this reason, we also support LD 453, which similarly increases the reimbursement rate to municipalities and tribes from 70% to 90%.

However, LD 1029 has elements not included in LD 453, which we believe play a crucial role in shoring up our state's response to the housing crisis. First, LD 1029 contains a provision that the total maximum assistance level must account for housing assistance while also ensuring adequate eligibility for other necessities. Given the rapidly rising rents across our state, an individual or household can reach the maximum assistance level with housing payments alone. This is the case for one of our clients, who is currently using her entire GA benefit amount to cover the rent for a modest one-bedroom apartment. When this client's caseworker stopped by the apartment, she noticed that, aside from a box of donated food, the client had very few possessions. As it stands, this client has no way to obtain household essentials, such as soap, toilet paper, and trash bags, because she has no remaining GA availability, and these items are not commonly available at food pantries. This bill's guidelines for maximum assistance levels acknowledge that rent is not the only expense individuals and families face; General Assistance should also be available to help with other costs, such as those for toiletries, diapers, and prescriptions.

Additionally, this bill streamlines operations at emergency shelters by increasing presumptive eligibility from 30 days to 180 days. Currently, when a

person arrives at an emergency homeless shelter, they are presumed to be eligible for General Assistance for 30 days, after which their eligibility must be re-determined. Yet the lack of affordable housing means that the average length of a shelter stay has increased significantly, and the need for General Assistance is likely to exceed 30 days. Expanding presumptive eligibility to 180 days removes an administrative burden from emergency shelter operators, who must assist their clients with completing additional GA paperwork every 30 days under the current rule.

Lastly, this bill increases GA reimbursement for emergency shelter costs to 100%. Earlier this session, you heard from emergency shelter directors who spoke about the precarious financial situation many shelters face due to higher demand for shelter, longer stays, and stagnant funding. Increasing GA reimbursement to municipalities and tribes for emergency shelter stays will make GA more feasible as one of several funding streams for shelter directors.

Preble Street urges you to better support the individuals and families who are experiencing our state's housing crisis firsthand by passing LD 1029.

Thank you for your time and consideration.