

Testimony of Ben Grant, At-Large City Councilor, City of Portland

In Support of **LD 1017, An Act to Include Food Provided or Served at Emergency Shelters
in General Assistance Reimbursement**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
April 7, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Ben Grant, At-Large member of the City Council in Portland.

The City of Portland is acutely aware of the high cost of addressing homelessness and the financial burden of Maine's General Assistance mandate on both the State and local municipalities. This proposal was born out of our study of actual GA costs, GA costs reimbursed by the state, and a disconnect between what it takes to provide basic necessities when people are experiencing a real emergency and what is typically reimbursable.

General assistance is available to cover demonstrated need when an individual cannot supply or pay for basic necessities, including food, water, shelter, medicine. As you know, the state reimburses municipalities for 70% of their direct costs of providing state-mandated general assistance. "Direct costs" typically include resources a town gives to an eligible resident for food, water, shelter, and medicine.

When an eligible person tells a municipality they are in an emergency situation requiring immediate assistance to meet basic needs, state law is such that a municipality must provide, pending verification, sufficient benefits to provide for basic necessities within twenty-four hours.¹ Additionally, there is a statutory presumption of GA eligibility when a person is in an emergency shelter.² There are areas of state law governing General Assistance that make it clear municipalities are a solution of last resort required to provide assistance in times of severe need.

In Portland, when someone is at an emergency shelter they are offered a meal, in addition to shelter. However, the cost for providing that meal is not a reimbursable expense. A municipality is reimbursed for assistance given directly to a GA recipient when that assistance is used for food, but a municipality is not reimbursed when it provides food at an emergency shelter. This is a disconnect that can and should be resolved. Municipalities should be reimbursed for the food assistance they provide to eligible GA recipients, regardless of whether that assistance is in the form of cash assistance or a plate of actual food.

LD 1017 would correct this disconnect by directing the department to include food served at emergency shelters as a cost that is eligible for reimbursement similar to food costs for an individual who is eligible for GA but who does not require emergency housing assistance in a shelter.

¹ 22 M.R.S. 4310.

² 22 M.R.S. § 4309.

On behalf of the City of Portland, I respectfully request that the Committee support municipalities as we work to meet our GA obligation and support LD 1017.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.