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

My name is Terence Miller, and I am the Advocacy Director at Preble Street. Preble Street operates 16 programs throughout Maine, and its staff works daily alongside hundreds of individuals and families who struggle with housing insecurity. Our mission 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 strongly opposes LD 1066, An Act Regarding Limits on Municipal General Assistance Programs. The proposed changes in this bill would disproportionately harm vulnerable individuals and families, many of whom rely on these programs to regain stability and rebuild their lives.

Recently, we learned of a client, Helen, who utilized an emergency shelter temporarily. Helen was able to obtain General Assistance for rental assistance and has been housed for six months now. Thanks to the support of GA, Helen is thriving and working on obtaining her GED while also volunteering at multiple non-profits to give back to the community. If housing assistance is reduced to 3 months within a 12-month period, this client would be unable to rebuild her life and would be back on the streets.

Mainers utilize General Assistance (GA) as a last-resort funding source, and limiting GA rental assistance will increase homelessness. In 2024, 1,809 families utilized GA to cover rent for more than three months. Cutting housing assistance to 3 months within a 12-month period would create more barriers for people already struggling to secure stable housing. Many individuals face complex and unpredictable challenges, including a lack of affordable housing, limited employment opportunities, and health concerns. Capping General Assistance rental assistance at 3 months does not provide enough time for people to identify alternative economic means to pay for rent. It will cause them to be homeless again.

Limiting the amount of assistance a household can receive to 30 days within a 12-month period would hurt people in already vulnerable situations. This policy would penalize households in unstable conditions, making it more difficult for them to recover from temporary setbacks or emergencies, such as illness or job loss. These restrictions disregard the real-world challenges that many individuals face. A limit on assistance would be detrimental to people who require longer-term support, pushing them into deeper poverty and potentially leading to homelessness.

Extending the ineligibility period for applicants who quit work or are fired for misconduct from 120 to 180 days fails to account for changes in individuals' circumstances. Many people who leave their jobs do so because of conditions beyond their control, including unsafe working environments, harassment, or the need to care for family members. Punishing individuals by extending the period of ineligibility for assistance will only exacerbate their financial hardships.

Requiring municipalities to mandate employment fails to recognize that not all recipients have the physical or mental capacity to perform additional labor, mainly if they are dealing with health issues, family responsibilities, or other barriers to employment. Mandating work as a condition for receiving General Assistance could burden individuals who are already struggling to meet their basic needs and add to the workload of municipalities administering GA.

Preble Street urges you to consider the lasting impact of GA on individuals and families facing hardship and to support policies that ensure its continued availability for Mainers rebuilding their lives. Please reject the proposed changes and continue working toward policies that support, rather than punish, people in need. We must ensure that every Mainer can live with dignity and stability, including access to the housing and assistance they need to thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.