



Susan Bernard  
Senator, District 1

**THE MAINE SENATE**  
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333

**LD 1066, "An Act Regarding Limits on Municipal General Assistance Programs."**

**Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services**

**Public Hearing**

**April 7, 2025**

**10:00am**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Senator Sue Bernard, and I am here to present *LD 1066, An Act Regarding Limits on Municipal General Assistance Programs*.

Maine's Municipal General Assistance program is a vital program and the Legislature has provided that each municipality and tribe generally be reimbursed for 70% of the direct costs for benefits granted under the program. It is administered by municipalities to help individuals and families to meet their basic needs. It is not intended to be a long-term sustainability program and is often described as a program of last resort. According to statute, "A general assistance program provides a specific amount and type of aid for defined needs during a limited period of time and is not intended to be a continuing "grant-in-aid" or "categorical" welfare program."

The first change proposed by the bill is straightforward and has already been discussed at length given its inclusion, and subsequent removal, from Part S of the Governor's proposed supplemental budget. It would limit housing assistance under the municipal general assistance program, except for temporary housing and emergency shelters, to a maximum of 3 months in a 12 month period. It would also limit municipalities from exceeding the maximum levels of assistance for all categories for no more than 30 days in a 12 month period.

This committee voted this proposal "out" earlier this year with the understanding the issue would be considered in the biennial budget. However, as these two budgets were effectively combined into LD 210 – the latest majority budget – this issue has not been addressed. Failure to do so means, as of today, we will need to come up with an additional \$10 million per year to cover the cost further exacerbating the problem.

Next, the bill would expand the existing period of ineligibility for an applicant who quits work or is discharged from employment due to misconduct from 120 to 180 days. The benefits afforded under this program are a safety net for unanticipated and unavoidable challenges faced by Maine people. Quitting your job or being fired for cause is neither and increasing the period of ineligibility for such actions will help ensure limited funds are being spent on those most in need.

Lastly, this bill would make a small, but important, change to the statute related to municipal work programs. Under current law, a municipality *may* require an eligible individual to perform work for the municipality or work for a nonprofit organization. Section four would simply change “may” to “shall”, requiring municipalities to establish and employ such a program. Larger municipalities can partner with numerous non-profit organizations, some of whom may be facing the prospect of smaller budgets and fewer staff, to create opportunities for individuals receiving assistance that benefit their community and bolster the efforts of local non-profits.

I would willing support a friendly amendment exempting municipalities with fewer than 4,000 residents from this requirement given the potential for additional administrative responsibilities and the reality that few, if any, individuals may be eligible given the exceptions outlined above. This number is based on the enforcement requirement for the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code (MUBEC).

Thank you for your consideration. I urge you to vote support this legislation.