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Testimony of the Office for Family Independence
Maine Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In support of LD 1996, *An Act to Clarify Responsibilities of the State in the Laws
Governing General Assistance*

Sponsor: Senator Ingwersen
Hearing Date: January 29, 2026

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Ian Yaffe, and I serve as the Director of the Office for Family Independence (OFI) in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1996 *An Act to Clarify Responsibilities of the State in the Laws Governing General Assistance*.

The Department appreciates the Legislature's intent in establishing a statewide General Assistance database and enhanced reporting requirements, and we share the goal of improving the availability of data and information regarding the usage of the GA program. At the time the statutory requirement for the provision of a statewide database was enacted, the Department believed it could absorb the expense to implement necessary software and did not anticipate the level of cost required to build and maintain a secure, statewide system for a municipally administered program. In August 2024, the Department launched a Request for Proposals (RFP) to build a technology platform for the GA program. Evaluation of these bids began earlier this year. The bids received ranged between \$752,000 to \$5,819,329 for the Initial Period of Performance (2 years). As planning progressed, it became clear that the scope and cost of a statewide General Assistance database exceeded what the Department can responsibly absorb within current funding. As a result, the Department is now faced with a statutory requirement that cannot be fully implemented within current resources. Given the current fiscal reality and ongoing increases to costs within the GA program, the Department cannot absorb these costs into Department resources as it originally intended.

Based on this financial reality, the Department proposes to:

- Repeal the requirement for the Department to provide an "Internet-based, real-time database containing the information necessary to properly determine an applicant's eligibility."
- Slightly modify the reporting requirements for the Department based on what can be reported without the database, using changes to the existing GA reimbursement form which would be effective on July 1, 2025, enabling a partial report for the January 2026 deadline for the report.

This bill provides a narrow, technical correction by removing the unfunded database mandate and related reporting requirement, bringing statute back into alignment with what can be operationally and fiscally supported.

The Department also wants to clarify the legislative history of this issue. In the prior legislative session (1st session of the 132nd), the Legislature voted to approve this change to address the lack of a GA data system, however, that provision was coupled with a separate policy change in H.P. 638, L.D. 978 that carried a fiscal impact. As a result, while the policy language advanced, the necessary appropriations did not pass. This bill, LD 1996, separates this narrow, technical correction from broader policy considerations, allowing the Legislature to address this issue independently and prevent ongoing statutory noncompliance.

The Department supports this bill and remains committed to transparency and accountability within the General Assistance program. We respectfully request the Committee's support of this bill as a standalone measure to prevent continued noncompliance and allow the Department and Legislature to revisit system modernization in the future if funding becomes available.

Thank you for your time and attention, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.