



CITY OF BANGOR

Testimony of Rindy Fogler City of Bangor, Community Services Manager

Before the

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services in Regard to of LD 1403: An Act to Amend the General Assistance Laws Governing Eligibility and Reimbursement

April 12, 2019

Good morning Sen. Gratwick, Rep. Hymanson and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Rindy Fogler, and I am the Community Services Manager for the City of Bangor responsible for the City's General Assistance Program. I am a board member of the Maine Welfare Directors' Association and am also here on their behalf. I am here today to testify regarding LD 1403: An Act to Amend the General Assistance Laws Governing Eligibility and Reimbursement. I will be testifying in opposition to the proposed eligibility requirements and in favor of the proposed reimbursement.

The first portion of LD 1403 deals with the use of presumptive eligibility in emergency shelters. This bill is unnecessary as it is addressed in MRSA 22 §4310 – Emergency Benefits Prior to Full Verification. Whenever an applicant for General Assistance states to the administrator that he or she is in an emergency situation and requires immediate assistance to meet basic necessities, the administrator, after an initial interview, can utilize presumptive eligibility to grant benefits under the following conditions:

- There is probability of eligibility for assistance after full verification;
- Where possible, there is adequate documentation to verify the need for immediate assistance;
- If adequate documentation is not available, the administrator will contact at least one other person for the purpose of obtaining information; and
- In no case will benefits exceed thirty days.

I have two primary concerns regarding the change proposed in LD 1403. First, it enables the administrator to presume eligibility for an individual or family experiencing homelessness for the full thirty day eligibility period. This is problematic, because if a complete and thorough application is taken within 24 hours as is suggested under MRSA 22 §4310 the applicant may have been found ineligible due to the availability of personal resources, disqualification in another community, or for other reasons outlined in statute. If found ineligible, their stay in the shelter would not be paid by General Assistance. Second, the proposed bill states “At the expiration of the period of eligibility, the person’s eligibility may be redetermined.” Determining continued eligibility should not be optional. In order to operate a General Assistance program with integrity, the administrator must ensure an applicant is eligible for benefits throughout the period in which they receive them. Not doing so opens up the potential for misuse of state and municipal funds.

With regard to the proposed changes in departmental reimbursement, both the City of Bangor and the Maine Welfare Directors' Association offer their full support. As I am the General Assistance administrator in Bangor, I will use our municipality as an example. Like most service center communities, we bear the brunt of meeting the needs of individuals and families from Bangor as well as those coming from neighboring communities in search of assistance. Instead of counting GA recipients in the tens or hundreds, our clients number in the thousands. This presents a significant financial burden to Bangor taxpayers. Allow me to use fiscal year 2018 as an example. During this period, the City expended \$2,042,486 in General Assistance benefits. Under the current 70% state reimbursement formula, Bangor taxpayers were responsible for \$612,746. Under the proposed 90% formula, that figure drops to \$358,755 which is a 41 % decrease. I'm certain the larger communities in the state who routinely exceed the .03% threshold would experience a similar drop in their local GA burden.

In summary, I and the Maine Welfare Directors' Association believe it is critical that a full application for General Assistance be taken as soon as possible after an individual or family presents for emergency assistance. Presumptive eligibility was never meant as a means to grant assistance for an entire 30 day eligibility period. It was meant to alleviate the immediate emergency until full eligibility can be established. LD 1403 would essentially eliminate the need for due diligence in determining eligibility. Further, a return to 90% reimbursement after the .03% threshold is met will relieve a significant tax burden on service center communities.