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Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Mary Kane, and I live in Hallowell. I am writing in support of LD 1695 on behalf of the Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network, motivated by our desire to promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person and justice, equity and compassion in human relations.

General Assistance (GA) is the safety net program of last resort for many Maine families who need assistance with basic necessities, including housing. Indeed, the eighty percent of program expenditures that go for housing assistance are even more critical now in the increasingly costly and competitive rental market. Without stable housing to count on, families cannot move forward with rebuilding their lives. But the current program provides neither stability for families nor predictability for landlords since it requires monthly applications for assistance. Moreover, rents have increased so dramatically in many areas that an individual's maximum GA benefit may be completely consumed in covering rent, leaving nothing for other basic necessities.

GA is a lifeline for Maine's most vulnerable, including families struggling with homelessness, persons with disabilities that prevent them from working, and immigrant families who are prohibited by federal law from working. This bill can make the GA program work better for all of them as well as for our towns that struggle to meet their needs. It would do so by:

- Guaranteeing that towns have adequate funds to provide emergency shelter and housing by increasing state reimbursement to 100%;
- Making it easier for emergency shelter providers to receive GA for those they house;
- Allowing GA recipients assistance for other basic necessities even if they have maxed out available benefits on housing;
- Allowing applicants to apply annually rather than monthly for rental assistance once they find housing.

The result is stability for tenants and landlords alike and tenants who can remain in decent housing from which they can focus on work and their children's education and can access support services to help them get back on their feet. That is a good result for all of us!

Thank you for your time and careful consideration of this bill.