

Good Afternoon Senator Brakey, Representative Gattine, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Joanie Klayman and I am the Director of Social Work at Preble Street.

Our mission at Preble Street is focused entirely on the work, the hard work of ending homelessness, hunger and poverty in Maine.

We continuously strive to meet this mission. We see successes every day; however, we are also seeing alarming increases in need. This past January alone we served 34,461 soup kitchen meals. This is in contrast to 22,543 meals in January of 2011. This is an increase of more than 50% in 4 years.

We served 1,366 meals in one day alone: January 25th.

It's the same story in the food pantry: 678 clients in January as compared to 462 in January 2011; another huge increase.

We are testifying before you today in strong opposition to LD 368 "*An Act To Integrate the State's General Assistance and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Programs*", LD 369, "*An Act To Align Municipal General Assistance Programs with the Immigration Status Policies of the Department of Health and Human Services*", and LD 1035, "*An Act To Create a 9-month Time Limit on General Assistance Benefits*". We also oppose the other bills being considered today that aim to make it more difficult to access vital help through the General Assistance program. Genuine reform efforts should focus on the underlying problems, the lack of affordable housing and untreated mental illness, instead of simply punishing people and making it more likely that they end up on the streets.

We are concerned about the State's growing number of homeless and near homeless families and individuals and the many of our most vulnerable individuals in shelters and jails.

At the Teen Center in Portland, we are seeing many unaccompanied asylum seeking youth who need temporary help while awaiting the opportunity to work or go to college. These are young people who come from horrendous situations and have traveled here alone. For many, politics and violence have left them to fend for themselves. Despite the trauma they have experienced, they are committed to the vision of America as a land in which their hard work will be rewarded, just like most of our

ancestors.

The proposed changes undermine an essential part of our state's safety net and will result in a step back from our goal to end homelessness and help families rebuild lives and receive needed support.

We fear that the proposed cuts and changes to General Assistance will only add to these sad and alarming numbers of people turning to us for help. We can't handle any more. Preble Street, like other nonprofits, is not in a position to meet this increase of homelessness and hunger.

We know very well that the solutions to the daily tragedies of poverty are complex. There is no one, quick fix. There is no one program, no one approach, no one state agency or one pool of State funds that is the answer to everything. It is a jigsaw puzzle where all the pieces need to fall into place.

General Assistance is a big piece in this puzzle; a very important piece. Often, it is the only source of financial support for people we care about. People we all care about: families, veterans, those struggling with mental illness. It is truly a program of last resort. It is also a program that helps to rebuild lives.

Let's not forget the obligation to help keep people alive.
Thank you.