



Shalom House

HOME • HEALTH • HOPE

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Mary Haynes-Rodgers
Executive Director

RE: LDs 10, 36, 219, and 220

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Norman Maze and I am the Housing Director for Shalom House, Inc.

On behalf of my employer, I testify today in opposition to LDs 10, 36, 219 & 220 which cause harm to Maine's poorest residents, especially to children and the disabled.

As a non-profit agency that provides housing and services to adults living with severe and persistent mental illness, Shalom House is keenly aware of the challenges faced by those of our clients who have little to no income. Their battles with mental illness, often complicated by substance abuse, make stable housing an elusive goal, many ending up in emergency homeless shelters or living on the streets at great risk to their health and safety.

The common denominator among those served by Shalom House and by the homeless providers around the state –is **Poverty**. Depending on one's point of view, solutions to Poverty fall along a continuum from crystal-clear to highly-complicated.

We recognize General Assistance as one small, but critical piece of the solution...providing temporary help until the longer-term pieces can be put together. We *do* agree that current laws governing GA eligibility, time-limits placed on its use, and penalties for misuse should be revised...but not how these proposed changes aim to do so. By creating more barriers to these emergency funds for our neighbors in need, our community hospitals, local homeless shelters, as well as municipal, county, and state law enforcement authorities, among others, will face even greater costs in addition to the greater human suffering more barriers will cause.

We also agree that any solution will require effort on the part of those affected by poverty. However, in order for a solution to succeed, such efforts should not result in these individuals and families being even more overwhelmed in their daily struggles to survive than they are currently.

Whatever the solutions, they **cannot** be achieved without a meaningful collaboration between the state and its various community providers. The solutions from such a collaboration must address the needs of the poor which are not fully met –like equal opportunities for a meaningful education and job training, availability of good childcare to allow parents to work, insurance coverage for healthcare, including mental healthcare, and a reliable means to access nutritious food choices. Let's work together to find solutions to Poverty by increasing the quality of and access to these and other essential needs.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that Shalom House is hopeful that the state will look for *other ways* than these proposed bills to find solutions to poverty by working in partnership with community providers to develop meaningful and lasting benefits for the sake of our less fortunate, fellow Mainers.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment today.



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