Department of Health and Human Services
Maine People Living Safe, Healthy and Productive Lives
Paul R. LePage, Governor
Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner

Department of Health and Human Services
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January 29, 2013

Senator Dawn Hill, Chair
Representative Margaret R. Rotundo, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
#100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Senator Margaret M. Craven, Chair
Representative Richard R. Farnsworth, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
#100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Dear Senator Hill, Senator Craven, Representative Rotundo, Representative Farnsworth, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

Attached is a report created in response to the mandate set forth by the 125th State Legislature, Public Law Chapter 655, (LD 1903, Part R). This work group was charged with recommending strategies for redesign of the General Assistance (GA) program to realize $500,000 in state savings in SFY '13. While this work group was charged with identifying $500,000 in savings, this was not its sole duty. There are several others of equal importance -- examining the GA program and recommending methods and standards to improve accountability, cost-effectiveness, uniformity, and program integrity.

The work group was composed of seven voting members and two non-voting members, representing local municipalities, Maine Municipal Welfare Directors, a municipality with a SOAR program, a consumer advocacy organization, Maine State Housing Authority, VA benefit expertise, affordable housing expertise and the Department of Health and Human Services. In addition to and supplemental to the work group meetings, three subgroups working on housing, administrative structure and benefit/eligibility redesign met regularly to develop specific proposals for consideration by the work group.

The work group and subgroups undertook a comprehensive review of the current GA program, inclusive of administrative structure, benefits and eligibility and housing issues. For a number of the proposals, the final report notes minority positions, typically where the Department disagreed with either the policy underlying the proposal or where the proposed savings for GA result in a cost shift to another State program or entity, rather than an outright savings. In addition to listing the proposals and the projected savings, the report notes minority positions in opposition to adopted proposals with the rationale for that opposition, as well as any issues the Department wishes to highlight with regard to the calculated savings.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Dale Denno, Director of the Office For Family Independence at 624-4101 or by email at dale.denno@maine.gov

Sincerely,

Mary C. Mayhew
Commissioner

MCM/klv

Attachment

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General Assistance Work Group Recommendation Report

January 29, 2013

Presented to:

The Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
And
The Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

By the:

Maine Department of Health and Human Services

Executive Summary

The General Assistance Work Group was created in 2012 by State Legislative mandate. The Work Group was charged with recommending strategies for redesign of the General Assistance (GA) program to realize $500,000 in state savings in SFY 2013. While this group is charged with identifying $500,000 in savings, this is not its sole duty. There are several others of equal importance. The Work Group was charged with examining the GA program and recommending methods and standards to improve accountability, cost-effectiveness, uniformity, and program integrity. The Work Group held its first meeting on June 8, 2012, and continued to meet for a total of 10 sessions. The committee was composed of seven voting members and two non-voting members, representing local municipalities, Maine Municipal Welfare Directors, a municipality with a SOAR program, a consumer advocacy organization, Maine State Housing Authority, VA benefit expertise, affordable housing expertise and the Department of Health and Human Services.

In addition to and supplemental to the Work Group meetings, three subgroups working on (i) housing, (ii) administrative structure and (iii) benefit/eligibility redesign met regularly to develop specific proposals for consideration by the Work Group.

The Work Group and the subgroups undertook a comprehensive review of the current (GA) program, inclusive of administrative structure, benefits and eligibility and housing issues. Research of Maine's various housing programs, homelessness studies, historic trends, cost reports, available VA benefits, alternative funding, GA applications, eligibility forms and the Department's audit process was conducted. For a number of the proposals, the final report notes minority positions, typically where the Department disagreed with either the policy underlying the proposal or where the proposed savings for GA result in a cost shift to another State program or entity, rather than an outright savings.

In addition to listing the proposals and the projected savings, the report notes minority positions in opposition to adopted proposals with the rationale for that opposition, as well as any issues the Department wishes to highlight with regard to the calculated savings.

As outlined in Table 1, a total of 35 recommendations were developed with projected total State savings in SFYs 2013 of **$833,507.**

Table 1: Summary of Work Group Recommendations

Sub-group	Strategy	State Savings SFY 2013 *
Administrative	Linking Clients to Non-GA	Unable to Determine*
	Standardized Application Form	0
	Amended Reimbursement Form	0
	Collaborative Technical Assistance	Unable to Determine
	Access to State's Electronic Database	42,091
	Creation of a Guidance Document for Determining Emergencies	Unable to Determine
	Unemployment Benefits as Available Income in Cases of Fraud	15,564
	Eliminate GA Funding for Burials	59,733*
	Employment-related TANF Extension	95,816*
	Uniformity in Administration of TANF Limit Extensions	15,360*
	Streamline the Asylum Seeker Application Process	Unable to Determine
	Improve Hardship Extension for Food Supplement and TANF Benefits	43,564*

Sub-group	Strategy	State Savings SFY 2013 *
	Restore State Public Assistance for Legal Immigrants	Unable to Determine*
	Use of Interim Assistance Agreements (IAA) in the TANF Program	0
	Better Utilization of the Alternative Aid Program	8,233*
	Fleeing Felons Ineligible for GA	12,800
	Circuit Breaker Benefit as Income	183,936*
	Pro-rata Calculation for Disqualifications	46,933
	Lump Sum Calculations	15,836
	Elimination of Deprivation Standard in TANF Program	128,000*
Housing	Administrator of the Program	0
	Maine State Housing Assist Local GA Administrators	Unable to Determine
	Implement Community Support Team Pilot	78,859
	Continuums of Care	0
	Establish of a Work Group	0
Benefits and Eligibility Redesign	Legal Representation for SSI/SSDI	0
	Cost of Legal Assistance	40,501
	Representative Payee	0
	VA Benefit Tracking	0
	SOAR Referrals	0
	Shift GA Recipient Needs to Other Sources of Funding	Unable to Determine
	Uniform VA Question on Application	Unable to Determine
	Mechanism to refer Veterans to the Appropriate Service's	Unable to Determine
	Increased VA to State Collaboration	Unable to Determine
	Connect Veterans to Appropriate Sources of Funding	Unable to Determine
	VA Benefit Savings	46,281

*** The Department believes savings numbers indicate a cost shift to another State program or entity, rather than an outright savings while other Committee members may disagree.**

Overview

The General Assistance (GA) Work Group was established in 2012 by legislative mandate "to review and make recommendations related to the general assistance program under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 22, chapter 1161, and (Public Law, Chapter 655, LD 1903, 125th Maine State Legislature). The review was to be inclusive of the following topics and objectives and align with the assumed duties to:

> "A. Review and propose suggestions for electronic data exchange between municipalities and the Department of Health and Human Services to increase efficiency in verifying general assistance program eligibility and improving program integrity;
> B. Examine the structure of the general assistance program and recommend methods and standards to improve accountability, cost-effectiveness and uniformity in the program;
> C. Review the role of the general assistance program in funding homeless shelter services and develop recommendations regarding whether the Department of Health and Human Services or the Maine State Housing Authority is the more appropriate state agency to operate and administer the general assistance program and to operate and administer housing assistance benefits under the general assistance program;
> D. Evaluate the appropriateness and the necessity of limiting general assistance benefits to persons receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program benefits and persons under sanction in

that program;

E. Review the pilot program established by the commissioner pursuant to this Part and make any recommendations necessary to improve the success of the pilot program; and

F. Develop proposed legislation designed to achieve $500,000 in General Fund savings from January 1, 2013 to June 30, 2013 and improve the efficiency, effectiveness, uniformity and financial accountability of the general assistance program." (Public Law, Chapter 655, LD 1903, 125th Maine State Legislature)

This report provides an overview of the Work Group's findings and recommendations for the review and reform of the GA program.

Background

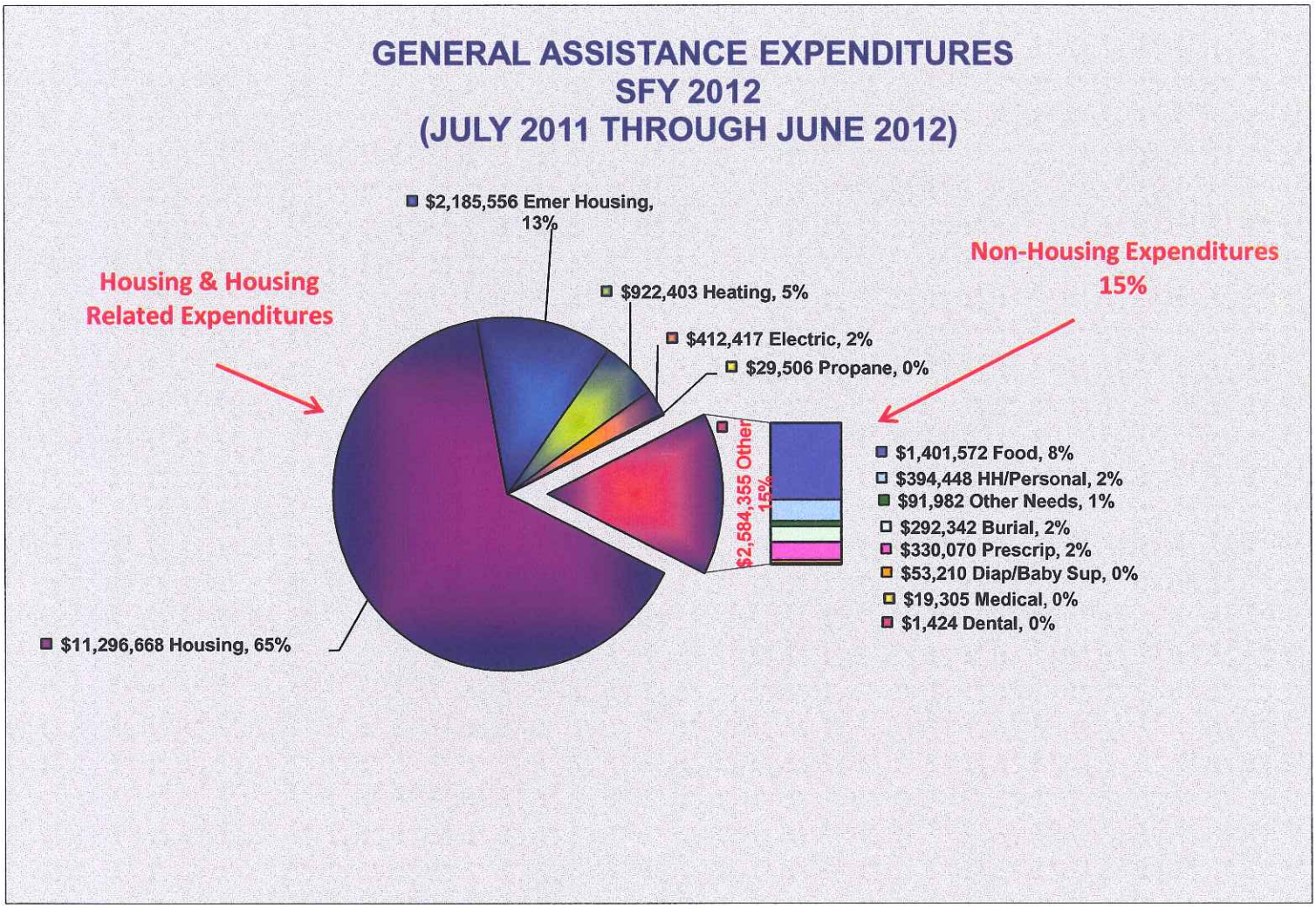
Work Group membership was established pursuant to PL 2011, Chapter 655, Sec. R - 4. Mary Mayhew, the Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services, served as the chair of the task force. Six additional voting members representing the Office for Family Independence, Maine municipalities, Maine Municipal Welfare Directors, a municipality with a SOAR program, a consumer advocacy organization, and the Maine Housing Authority and two additional non-voting members with knowledge of Veteran's benefits and knowledge of affordable housing programs were appointed to the Work Group. The Work Group met ten times between June and December, 012 and subgroups of the main working group held more than a dozen additional meetings. All meetings were open to the public and provided an opportunity for public input and comment. Meeting minutes and agendas from all ten Work Group meetings are available in the Appendix.

Process

After clarifying housekeeping items related to meeting procedure, public input, voting framework, alternates for each member and potential sub-group creation, the General Assistance (GA) Work Group began to immediately delve into the history of the program, current fiscal status, major cost-drivers of the program and other challenges.

The discussion focused largely on housing, as it is the largest cost-driver, leading the group to review the history of housing costs in the context of the overall cost of living and average income variations. Historical Shares of Consumer Expenditures for Food and Housing information showed that from 1990 – 2010 housing and housing related costs increased by 17 percent as a percent of household expenditures. Maine State Housing verified that data, reporting that average rent in the past ten years, went up by the same amount, with an average income increase of 27.5 percent and median home prices increase of 50.1% over last 10 years. The housing experts on the Work Group and the data presented made it clear that available vouchers or other need- based housing subsidies are limited and are not able to play a substantial role in reducing GA costs as there are considerably more individuals eligible for help from the Section 8 Program than there are available slots to serve them.

General Assistance Spending Breakout:



Costs in housing are affected by the challenges of homelessness and the work associated with the chronically homeless population. In an effort to better understand the challenges and help provide solutions, the work group heard from a number of individuals who work in the field.

Doug Gardner presented a UNE study *Final Evaluation of Homelessness Prevention Rapid Re-housing Program.* John Bradley (Logan Place) and Tom McLaughlin (UNE) presented the *Housing First* model, highlighting the savings achieved for each individual in the program. Sheldon Wheeler (DHHS) presented info on Shelter-Plus Care and Geoff Miller (DHHS) presented the Stability Through Engagement Program Summary. All documents can be seen at www.maine.gov/dhhs/ga.

Administrative costs and practices were addressed by the Work Group in more detail, including a review of the projected cost of municipal administration, State administrative costs, a breakdown of GA use by clients in Portland and a statewide look at households qualified for Section 8 housing assistance. There was consensus of the Work Group that the work should be broken up and addressed by three separate subgroups focused on administration; housing; and benefit/eligibility redesign. After inviting individuals to participate, the Work Group provided specific goals and objectives to focus the subgroups and asked for reports back to the whole group at regular intervals. Ultimately, the subgroups made recommendations to be considered by the GA Work Group

Table 2: Sub Group Members and Charges

Sub Group	Members	Charge
Administrative Structure	Kate Dufour, Chair Robin Merrill, Vice Chair Robert Duranleau Frank D'Alessandro Sue Charron Dave Maclean Ellen Heath	Assess the core competencies necessary for the administration of GA and determine the appropriate entity for that administration. If appropriate, distinguish by benefit category Propose any recommended changes to the administration of the program based on that assessment Assess the application process and identify key elements to be standardized to enable greater consistency and equity statewide Review current audit policies and propose any recommended changes that will enable greater equity within the program Propose program integrity improvements to the program, placing greater responsibility on recipients to provide accurate information
Housing	John Anton, Chair Denise Lord, Vice Chair Shawn Yardley Robyn Merrill Sheldon Wheeler Shannon Courtois Donna Staples Mark Swann	Compile a comprehensive guide to all relevant funding mechanisms for housing that could be provided to GA recipients and develop a proposal to make those sources accessible to municipalities and GA recipients Identify the entity best equipped to connect individuals to alternative housing and to negotiate housing rates on a broad scale to produce cost savings. Develop a proposal to transition administration of all housing-related costs in GA to that entity or re-structure the housing aspect of GA to realize savings from efficiencies Identify proposals related to programs for the homeless that will move individuals from their current higher cost of care to lower cost services Review the costs to GA for homeless shelters and propose recommendations for cost efficiency and equitable treatment

Benefit/Eligibility Redesign	Doug Gardner, Chair Peter Ogden, Vice Chair Jack Comart Mike Frey Linda Fossa Bob Clark Dan Coyne John Bradley	Review the SOAR pilot project and make recommendations to make it more efficient and increase its ability to save money Review the appropriateness and necessity of limiting GA to individuals receiving TANF or other benefits Review veterans' programs and the potential for shifting some long term cost currently in the GA program to the VA. Develop proposal to connect veterans to VA benefits in an efficient, long term way Explore the potential to create savings through case management Review the Electronic Data Exchange and identify efficiencies that will allow municipalities to better align benefits to drive efficiency and cost savings Identify administrative structures to assure that all potential benefit sources for a GA recipient are considered in connection with a needs assessment

Each subgroup met as many as eight times to create detailed recommendations to the Work Group. Though all recommendations did not receive unanimous approval of the entire subgroup, there was a high level of consensus on most issues.

Recommendations

The GA Work Group met five times between October and November to review and discuss the recommendations of the subgroups. The fleshed-out proposals can be seen in the table below, with vote totals and anticipated savings noted in the column to the right.

NOTE: All proposals are calculated for a four months savings in SFY 13, except for "Better Utilization of the Alternative Aid Program, Uniformity in Administration of TANF Time Limit Extensions, Implement Community Support Team Pilot, Cost of Legal Assistance and VA Benefit Savings". These are calculated for six months since legislation is not needed.

Recommendation	Vote	Savings *
Administrative Subgroup Recommendations		
Linking Clients to Non-GA Benefit: The work group unanimously recommends that the Department direct a subgroup represented by the Department, municipalities, client advocates, CAP agencies and Maine State Housing to work with 211 system administrators to determine which agency or entity would be the most appropriate to act as a non-GA client resources list clearinghouse and to develop mechanisms for outreach to membership organizations to ensure clients are aware of all available resources.	**Unanimous**	**Unable to Determine***

Standardized Application Form: The work group recommends that all municipalities be required to use the same application form. This will bring a sense of uniformity to the system, as the same data would be collected from each applicant. A subgroup with representation from the state, municipalities, and client advocates will work collaboratively to draft the uniform application.	**Unanimous**	**None**
Amended Reimbursement Form: Requires all municipalities to use the State's revised reimbursement form. This will assist the State in collecting the information necessary to meet the data needs of the Legislature, as well as other interested parties. A subgroup with representation from the state, municipalities, and client advocates would develop the form, keeping in mind the need to balance data needs and municipal and state level workload.	**Unanimous**	**None**
Collaborative Technical Assistance: Building on the existing hotline program, the complaint reporting process would be designed to ensure that all interested parties, including administrators, department officials, and clients, are aware of program rules and processes. The system would be designed primarily as a means for sharing information and addressing misinterpretations of laws and regulations. However, the Department would be afforded disciplinary authority. The process should also include a provision to ensure that the complaint reporting process is not abused.	**Unanimous**	**Unable to Determine**
Access to State's Electronic Database. This recommendation facilitates GA administrator access and use of an electronic database by: 1. Directing the Department, in consultation with administrators and client advocates, to create the list of variables to be provided to administrators for the purposes of determining client eligibility; 2. Enabling administrators to access the data through one of four means, including Internet, e-mail, fax, or phone; 3. Identifying incentives, including the inherent reduction of GA administrator workload (i.e., avoiding initial denials for assistance based on a lack of information), to encourage the use of the Internet-based process; and 4. Directing the Department to study and report on the effectiveness of the changes, including information on the number of communities using the Internet-based process.	**6 support** **1 abstain**	**$42,091**
Creation of a Guidance Document for Determining Emergencies: The work group unanimously recommends the creation of a three member working group to develop a guidance resource for GA administrators to use when determining if Emergency Assistance should be provided. The purpose of the document is to ensure that, to the extent practical, emergency assistance is uniformly issued from community-to-community. The working group would include a state, municipal and low-income client advocate representative.	**Unanimous**	**Unable to Determine**

Unemployment Benefits as Available Income in Cases of Fraud: The work group unanimously recommends allowing GA administrators to count unemployment insurance income as available to a client in situations where the client has lost unemployment benefits due to fraud as defined by the unemployment insurance program. Under existing law, the municipal administrators cannot count the forfeited income in the determination of eligibility and benefits.	**Unanimous**	**$15,564**
Eliminate GA Funding for Burials: **Majority Report:** The work group recommended repealing the section of law that requires the GA program to fund the burial expenses, provided that the Legislature enacts an alternative to fund the services without directly or indirectly (i.e., reductions in revenues dedicated to municipal programs and services, etc.) shifting cost to the property taxpayers. **Minority Report:** The Department's view is that this proposal does little more than shift costs to some undetermined General Fund account, which the Legislature would presumably need to fund in another account.	**5 support** **2 oppose**	**$59,733*** *Department Opinion: There are no General Fund savings; this is a cost-shift. Majority note: There may still be general fund savings even though this shifts cost elsewhere if that other place is not supported with general fund dollars*
Employment-related TANF Extension: **Majority Report:** The work group supported a provision to extend TANF benefits beyond the 60-month limit in cases where job availability is determined to be unfavorable. The extension would be offered if: 1) the individual, due to education, training, literacy level, skills or other factors is deemed not "job-ready." or 2) the individual is unemployed due to a lack of job opportunities in the local area as established by a local unemployment rate in excess of the State's average. As a condition of receiving this extension the individual must participate in an ASPIRE plan leading to employment. The majority believes that there are sufficient funds available in Maine's federal TANF block grant to support this proposal. **Minority Report:** The minority, comprising the Department's representatives and the MSHA representative, oppose this proposal on the basis of both policy and practical considerations. From a policy perspective, the proposal opens up such a broad and ambiguous exception to the TANF 60-month benefit cut-off that it undermines the basic purpose of this fundamental welfare reform provision. As drafted, and in combination with the existing extension options, it would appear that many recipients meeting the 60-month limitation would be eligible for continuation of TANF.	**4 support** **3 oppose**	**$95,816*** *Department Note: The savings to General Assistance result from a cost shift to the federal TANF block grant*

Uniformity in Administration of TANF Limit Extensions: In the experience of both advocates and municipalities, qualification for a TANF extension varies from region-to-region. The work group supported establishing a set procedure for the processing and determining TANF extensions. The Majority believes that improved uniformity is necessary to ensure full compliance with the current law.	**5 support** **1 oppose**	**$15,360*** *Department Note: We believe that the savings is based on creating more uniformity for the purpose of granting more extensions, which will be direct expense/cost shift to TANF.*
Streamline the Asylum Seekers Application Process: To be eligible for asylum, an applicant must have suffered past persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion and/or membership in a particular social group. Although, asylum applications are statutorily required to be adjudicated within 180 days of filing, in reality it often takes several years to obtain a final decision. The work group supported exploring ways to support asylum applicants through the application process, including increasing access to resources such as workshops for those who are applying for asylum on their own, as well as increased advocacy efforts to change federal law and policy to alleviate some of the "bottle necking" that currently exists within the system. Increasing the expediency of the asylum application process will offset costs to GA because individuals will be able to gain employment sooner and/or will be able to access state and federal benefits, if necessary.	**5 support** **2 abstain**	**Unable to Determine**
Improve Hardship Extension for Food Supplement and TANF Benefits: **Majority Report:** Asylum seekers and lawful permanent residents (LPRs), during their first five years with that status, can now only qualify for food supplement and TANF benefits if they fall into a hardship category as defined in DHHS rule. Under current law, hardship includes individuals who are waiting for work documentation, however once work authorization is received the individual becomes ineligible regardless of whether or not he or she has secured employment. By a vote of 6 to 1, the subgroup supported expanding access to benefits to: 1) those who have obtained work documentation and are making a reasonable effort to obtain employment and until that individual becomes employed; and 2) for those individuals who have received work documentation but are not yet employable and who are engaged in a Department-approved education or literacy and skill training program, or on a waiting list for such a program. **Minority Report:** The applicable benefits are funded solely with General Fund dollars. These savings would result in increased	**4 support** **2 oppose** **1 abstain**	**$43,564*** *Department Note: General Assistance savings would be offset by increased expenditures in other accounts*

expenditures for these benefits, and a net increase in General Fund expenditures. Further, administering a program as described above would impose substantial new burdens on the already stretched resources of the Office for Family Independence.		
Restore State Public Assistance for Legal Immigrants: **Majority Report:** By a vote of 5 to 2, the subgroup supported a proposal that would restore the state budget cuts to MaineCare, Food Supplement and TANF benefits for asylum seekers, lawful permanent residents, and other lawful immigrants enacted as part of the 2012-2013 biennial state budget. **Minority Report:** This proposal reverses savings of $2.6 M for State Funded Maine Care, $100,000 for State Funded TANF, and $80,000 and for State Funded Food Supplement, booked in the last Legislative session; adoption would result in increased General Fund expenditures.	**4 support** **2 oppose** **1 abstain**	**Unable to Determine*** *Department Note: Any General Assistance savings would shift costs to other accounts*
Use of Interim Assistance Agreements (IAA) in the TANF Program: A study group, consistent with the GA work group composition, should be convened to review the process for implemented IAAs and any revenue generated and/or any other funding source identified be used to increase housing special needs payments with a report due to the legislature by April 1, 2013.		**$0 Potential savings from this proposal will be reviewed as part of the recommended continuation of work on this issue as proposed.**
Better Utilization of the Alternative Aid Program: The work group unanimously supports improving access to the Alternative Aid program for those eligible and ensuring that the benefit is made available to people timing off of TANF as a means to reduce GA costs. The Alternative Aid program is an important program for low-income working families, but unfortunately many families don't know about it. During 2012, on average, only 66 families accessed the program each month. These numbers are low despite the fact that many Maine families are in need the type of support provided by the Alternative Aid program. The program helps families with children who are *not* on TANF resolve emergencies that prevent them from getting or keeping a job. Informing people about this program and assisting those who are eligible for the Alternative Aid benefit access the program would take some of the strain off of the General Assistance program and help to offset GA costs. This proposal does not make any changes in the eligibility or benefits available under the Alternative Aid Program; it simply encourages parties to ensure that more eligible families are aware of the it to improve their chances of getting or keeping employment. .	**Unanimous**	**$8,233*** *Department Note: The Department believes the savings to General Assistance result from a cost shift to the federal TANF block grant*

Fleeing Felons Ineligible for GA: The work group unanimously supports making any fleeing felon ineligible for GA.	**Unanimous**	**$12,800**
Consider Circuit Breaker Benefit as Income: **Majority Report:** Under existing law, municipal GA administrators are prohibited from counting the Circuit Breaker benefit as available income in the determination of eligibility and benefits. The work group recommends that the circuit breaker benefit count as income unless used for basic necessities. **Minority Report:** The dissenting votes would have been supportive of the proposal if the circuit breaker benefit was limited to use for "housing related expenses" instead of the broader "basic necessities".	**4 support** **3 oppose**	**$183,936*** *Department Note: There is a bill currently pending to eliminate the Circuit Breaker Program except to those age 65 and older. If passed, this would eliminate most, if not all, of the above listed savings to General Assistance.*
Pro-rata Calculation for Disqualifications: Currently, the pro-rata share of assistance provided to a household when some, but not all members are sanctioned for a GA program violation is calculated differently across the state. The working group recommends clarifying that pro-rata is calculated by dividing the maximum level of assistance available to the entire household by the total number of household members.	**6 support** **1 oppose**	**$46,933**
Lump Sum Calculations: As required by state statute, lump sum payments (e.g., inheritances, SSI retroactive payments, court settlements, etc.) provided to applicants must be taken into consideration in the determination of GA eligibility and benefits. Under existing law, the pro-rata calculation for a lump sum payment is calculated by using the greater of the entire household's verified actual monthly expenses or 150 percent of the applicable Federal Poverty Level guidelines. In some cases, basing the calculation of available income on the basis of the adjusted federal poverty level, rather than actual expenses, has the impact of discounting available income and subsequently increasing GA program costs. The work group recommends amending the pro-rata calculation for lump sum payment on the basis of actual costs only.	**6 support** **1 oppose**	**$15,836**

Elimination of Deprivation Standard in TANF Program: **Majority Report:** The TANF program currently includes as a condition of eligibility a requirement specifying children be deprived of parental support (deprivation) based on the continued absence or death of a parent or, for two-parent households, children deprived of parental support based on the unemployment or underemployment of the primary wage earner, or the incapacity of one of the parents. The deprivation rules often create an economic condition so severe that it leads to family break up. In situations in which the parents are already separated, the rules discourage the involvement of both parents in the non-financial care of the child. These outcomes are counter to the Department's efforts to use the TANF program to help stabilize families and move them to self-sufficiency. Families that meet the income guidelines for TANF are often deemed ineligible due to the deprivation standard and subsequently turn to GA for help. This shifts federal/state TANF costs to the state/municipal GA program, and denies these adults access to the employment related services offered through the ASPIRE program that they need in order to sustain meaningful employment. Only a minority of states (10 including Maine) have maintained some form of the deprivation standard that existed in TANF's predecessor program, AFDC. The vast majority of states eliminated the deprivation requirement recognizing it as bad public policy. The elimination of the deprivation standard is pro-family, promotes children's wellbeing, and is consistent with family stability goals. By a vote of 5 to 1, with 1 abstention, the subgroup recommended studying the experiences in other similarly situated states and developing a process to repeal the deprivation standard in Maine's TANF program. **Minority Report:** The Department appreciates the pro-family aspects of the proposal and believes that it warrants further study. However, TANF benefit costs would be significantly increased, potentially requiring reduction in overall benefit levels and/or additional eligibility restrictions. Increased expenditures would also potentially impact Department efforts to restructure its ASPIRE program to enhance job preparedness for all TANF recipients.	**4 support** **3 oppose**	**$128,000*** *Department Note: The Department believes that the savings to General Assistance result from a cost shift to the federal TANF block grant, with an increase in overall benefit expenditures*
Housing Subgroup Recommendations		
Administrator of the Program: There should be no changes in state-level administration recommended.	**Unanimous**	**None**
Maine Housing to Assist Local General Assistance Administrators: MSHA will provide access to information about program and housing availability and to resources that reduce overall costs of housing services. Specifically, Maine Housing can: • Provide information about housing programs through its Maine Rental Housing Guide and updating the Housing Resource Matrix and posting these resources on its homepage	**Unanimous**	**Unable to Determine**

• Hosting and maintaining the Housing Search service on its homepage; • Provide referral services to a consumer specialist located in Maine Housing for residents in need of housing and housing services; • Identify opportunities to reduce GA housing related costs through collaborative approaches such as joint purchasing of home heating fuel; • Share information with GA administrators on a regular basis about available housing programs and services and proposed changes in federal programs that may affect the cost of housing such as changes in Fair Market Rent standards; • Collect and analyze information about housing availability and affordability in Maine. **Specific Actions Include:** • Explore 211 as a central clearinghouse for housing services and other services. This is an Administrative Subgroup recommendation. • Update MH webpage to create a partners page for General Assistance Administrators; make it easier forger administrators to find useful information, and avoid have to drill into MH homepage to find it. • Market webpage and access to a housing referral specialist to GA administrators; solicit their input as to use and relevance • Working with MMA and Welfare Directors Association, improve ongoing communications by: o Distributing a periodic e-newsletter for GA administrators; o Developing trainings and outreach, the Welfare Directors Annual meetings are opportunities to share information and address barriers; identify other opportunities for sitting down and addressing common concerns such as the Public Housing Authorities' forum for rental assistance programs; o Creating an easy to understand housing program resource list that describes what is currently available and the wait lists in each region/county; o Identifying opportunities for joint purchasing and share these opportunities with GA administrators		
<u>Implement Community Support Team Pilot:</u> This pilot proposal will move people receiving General Assistance out of shelters into permanent supportive housing to identify savings to DHHS	**Unanimous**	**$78,859**
<u>Continuums of Care:</u> The two Continuums of Care in Maine are charged by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) with prioritizing and recommending HUD McKinney funding for specific programs in their geographic area. Each continuum is required to have a clear process for determining how funding can be best used to meet the challenge of homelessness. We recommend that each continuum revise their evaluation criteria so that programs funded by the	**Unanimous**	**None**

continuum are prioritized by their impact in decreasing homelessness in the community. As such, each continuum will consider reallocating funds from existing programs to permanent supportive housing programs. We recommended that, at a minimum, key evaluation metrics include: • percentage of households connected with and maintaining permanent housing over time (at least 6 months); • number of households coming out of shelters (where relevant): and; • relative cost and efficiency of each program		
Establishment of a Work Group: The GA program was originally intended for the immediate aid of persons who are unable to provide the basic necessities essential to maintain themselves or their families. A General Assistance program provides a specific amount and type of aid for defined needs during a limited period of time and was not intended to be a continuing "grant-in-aid" or "categorical" welfare program. Shelters have become a long-term home for a small but significant population of mentally ill and/or substance abusing Mainers whose health needs have not been directly addressed by DHHS. DHHS and Maine Housing shall establish a work group including, but not limited to, GA administrators, shelter providers and municipal funders to develop a unified service and housing delivery system for the homeless and to discuss statute changes related to the municipality of responsibility. The new system will organize existing and new financial resources around providing case management services and housing subsidies at the level necessary to create permanent housing stability while restoring shelter usage for those in temporary crisis. Specific issues to be examined by the work group include: • Emergency, short term housing assistance o Define emergency short term and shelter housing (amount and type of aid); o Identify reasonable costs for providing emergency shelter housing; o Propose a method or methods of attributing these costs to municipalities and GA reimbursement • Chronic Homeless Services: Develop or expand grant-in-aid or categorical programs to address the housing and service needs of people who currently are longer-term users of homeless shelter services. o Funding for these services should be examined to determine if resources are matching need; o Are these programs effective?; o To the extent, GA is currently funding these chronic homeless services; identify other, existing programs that provide housing assistance such as BRAP that would be better investments. Work group to report back their recommendations by April 1, 2013	**Unanimous**	**None**

The recommendations above were adopted by 7-0 votes at the 10/23/2012 meeting.		
Benefits and Eligibility Redesign Subgroup		
Legal Representation for SSI/SSDI: **Majority Report:** Every SSI/SSDI case not approved at the reconsideration phase should be referred to the legal assistance contractor for evaluation and potential representation. **Minority Report:** The Department is already aggressively pursuing SSI/SSDI support options for recipients of the GA and TANF programs. The Department is actively reviewing all options for maximizing the effectiveness of these efforts, and is not convinced that the proposed process would be cost-effective or achieve optimal results. The Department is further concerned that the proposal as written would unduly hamstring its ability to make appropriate decisions in response to what is learned as the program is implemented.	**5 support** **2 oppose**	**Unable to Determine**
Cost of Legal Assistance: The legal assistance expense of $450,000 budgeted by DHHS should be reduced to $225,000 in year one in recognition that the pilot will only be operational for a six month period in this year.	**5 support** **2 oppose**	**$40,501**
Representative Payee: The SOAR pilot should include a Representative Payee component and to that end, the department should convene a group of stakeholders to investigate how such a program could be developed and funded, including reinvesting some of the $500,000 savings in the next State Fiscal Year for this purpose. This effort should be coordinated with the VA Fiduciary Program to the extent possible for this type of service.	**Unanimous**	**None**
VA Benefit Tracking: The department shall develop a process to follow-up and track the referrals made to the Bureau of Veteran Services.	**Unanimous**	**None**
SOAR Referrals: To be effective and realize the level of projected savings, the SOAR Pilot must function as a referral resource for local GA administrators for clients that may be eligible for SSI/SSDI and other Veteran's Benefit.	**Unanimous**	**None**
Shift GA Recipient Needs to Other Sources of Funding: GA recipients should be encouraged to pursue STEP vouchers and any other potential vouchers such as VASH, BRAP, etc.	**Unanimous**	**Unable to Determine**
Uniform VA Question on Application: A uniform question should be developed to be asked as part of every assistance program in terms of Veteran status. Our research indicates that the following question should be used for this purpose: Have you or a member of your family ever served in the armed forces?	**Unanimous**	**Unable to Determine**

Mechanism to refer Veterans to the Appropriate Services: There should be a mechanism for GA administrators to refer potentially eligible veterans to the VA for assistance and the new DHHS Disability Advocates. There needs to be a way to track and follow-up on the final disposition of the applicant. This will also assist GA administrators in determining ongoing GA eligibility.	**5 support 1 oppose 1 abstain**	**Unable to Determine**
Increased VA to State Collaboration: The Commissioner of DHHS should convene a meeting with all Veterans Affairs organizations to discuss how best to connect veterans to benefits and services they are entitled to.	**Unanimous**	**Unable to Determine**
Connect Veterans to Appropriate Sources of Funding: The Department and the VA should support and encourage future Support Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) funding opportunities to ensure that the entire state is covered. SSVF programs can support housing expenses up to 6 months and because housing assistance (including emergency housing) approximately 78% of all statewide GA expenditures in SFY 2011, this will result in a direct offset to the GA program.	**Unanimous**	**Unable to Determine**
VA Benefit Savings: The DHHS budget for the SOAR pilot does not include any savings associated with moving veterans from General Assistance to Veterans Cash Benefits. With the significant focus of connecting veterans with appropriate benefits, should be booked as additional savings (revenue) for the pilot.		**$46,281**

*** Indicate a cost shift to another State program or entity, rather than an outright savings.**

Rejected Proposals	Vote	Savings
TANF 60-Month Limit: Make individuals who have timed off of TANF ineligible for GA	**3 support 4 oppose**	**$111,176 +#**
Homeless Shelter Reimbursement: Have DHHS work with key stakeholders to formalize homeless shelter reimbursement rates based on definitions of allowable costs and determination of reasonable costs.	**3 support 4 oppose**	**$266,792 #**
Block Grant Concept: Consider a block grant/regionalized approach to the administration of General Assistance statewide.	**2 support 4 oppose 1 abstain**	**Depends on the Block Grant Amount**

+ Savings of a total of $111,176 accounted for and duplicated in TANF extension proposals.

 # Calculation proposed by DHHS, and not vetted by the Work Group.