

Report on Belfast GA issues with State Reimbursement, settlement negotiations and future GA expenses:

I: You need to know the Rules of GA:

- 1) This is a State mandated program. Must have local program and local ordinance that matches State Regulations 22MRSA Part 5 Chapter 1161
- 2) Anyone can apply 22 MRSA 4308. The Municipality must let them 22 MRSA 4305 (3) B.
- 3) **Easy to claim Belfast resident Status:** Resident defined as a person present in the City who asserts that they are homeless and it is their intent to live in the City and they have no other residence. 22 MRSA 4307
- 4) **A municipality may NOT move or transport a person into another municipality to avoid responsibility for general assistance support.** 22MRSA 4307 (1)
- 5) GA is a limited program offering limited benefits unless there is an emergency. It only covers Basic necessities. **Basic necessities are housing, heat, food, electricity, household and personal supplies, prescription medication and non-elective medical expense.** 22MRSA 4301 (1)
- 6) They can only apply once every 30 days.

Maximum benefits to cover all Basic Necessities are not very much: (without it being an “emergency” as defined in the regulations).

Persons in Household

1	2	3	4	5
\$655	\$741	\$867	\$1191	\$1,266

- 7) **People who apply for GA are required to spend any available money they have from others sources on these itemized Basic Necessities.** Every dollar they spend on Non-Basic Necessities such as cable TV, cigarettes, Internet, Rent-A-Center will reduce their GA benefit by that same dollar. An applicant cannot pay a \$75 cable bill and expect the GA program to pay their rent. 22MRSA4315-A
- 8) **People cannot create their need and expect GA benefits.** So if you quit your job without just cause or loan \$200 to your friend you cannot expect the program to help you as you have created your own need. 22 MRSA 4315, 4316-A, 4317
- 9) **In an emergency, as defined in the regulations, the maximum benefits listed above can be exceeded to cover basic necessities.**

- 10) An emergency is defined as:**
- 1. A life threatening situation**
 - 2. Not created by the applicant and out of the control of the applicant**
 - 3. which if not alleviated immediately could reasonably be expected to pose a threat to the health or safety of the person** 22MRSA 4301(4)

11) Emergency assistance cannot be granted if the applicant or a household member is currently disqualified for false representation on GA issues, fails to meet work requirements or to pursue potential resources that would alleviate their need for GA assistance. It also cannot be granted when the household member could have averted the emergency situation by using their own resources. 22MRSA 4308 (2)

12) People asserting that they are disabled and can document that they are pursuing Soc Sec Disability are not expected to look for work as the Dr. is saying that they have a work disability.

II: Why did we spend so much more in 2016 than we did in 2015?

Spent

2010	\$100,000
2015	\$30,000
2016	\$325,000

1. We were not helping people in 2015 that we should have and we knew it. We expected to spend more in 2016, but not this much more.

- Applicants told not to apply until they found a place for them to live, secured certain documentation. Many never returned.
- people were turned away as non-residents who in fact qualified as residents under statute
- we denied benefits and disqualified people who should have received them under the statute
- we denied local temporary housing to people in winter months and mostly referred them out of the City to homeless shelters in Bangor and Rockland at no expense to us.

2. We also adopted a City Policy that was more favorable to help applicants and to help them maximize their benefits under the program

- We shifted from sending all those without housing to homeless shelters to a system using temporary housing in Motels, campgrounds etc. This represents a \$115,000 expenditure in 2016, most of which was incurred between November and May.

This led to maximum benefits being legally and properly exceeded on many individual applications because winter and sub zero temperatures are emergency situations for

people with no place to stay warm and winter is not a condition that applicants either created or could have controlled

The existing low cost housing that was available in Belfast was already packed with poor people. We spent another \$97,000 in 2016 paying landlords for apartments and mobile home rentals.

Having this many people in temporary (emergency winter) housing in motels led to larger expenditures for food. If they need help with one they usually need help with the other. We spent about \$75,000 for food alone in 2016.

Electricity \$23,000

Heating Oil \$6,000

Funerals \$5,000

3. **We are attracting more people to Belfast all the time. The poor are no different.** So we have more new applicants. Under the State regulation's a person can go to any Maine Town and request GA assistance if they present themselves at that Town or City, declare that they are homeless and indicate their desire to stay there. Under Maine law where that individual or family ends up becomes the "Municipality of Responsibility" for that applicant (22 MRSA 4307 (2)).
4. When this is added to the prohibition against moving or transporting applicants to other communities to avoid their responsibilities for that applicant (22 MRSA 4307 (1)) **we felt that we had to provide temporary housing when there was no available permanent housing. We thought that the practice of just sending them away to a homeless shelter as we mostly did in 2015 was inconsistent with these State Laws. Apparently it is not.**
5. **We ended up with a lot more applications- 3 times as many** -for reasons outlined above in # 1, 2, 3 and 4. So when we saw that we were spending three times as much as we did in 2010, it seemed to make sense.

**III: The State reimburses the City for a portion of the Total GA expense (70%).
Are we going to get fully reimbursed for all of the money we spent in Fiscal
2016?**

**No
Why Not?**

Because we have learned that the documentation in our files that backs up our decision to provide GA assistance is not always complete to sufficiently demonstrate that our handling of the application was correct and therefore entitled to reimbursement.

If there was a gap in the documentation in the file, it is just as likely that reimbursement could be denied on a file where someone was entitled to assistance as it would be to a file where someone was not entitled to assistance.