

Janet T. Mills
Governor

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Commissioner



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SUBJECT: GA Guidance as the Civil Emergency Ends
TO: Municipalities providing General Assistance
DATE: June 30, 2021

Dear Municipal Officer:

On June 11, Governor Mills announced that the Civil State of Emergency (CSE) will end June 30, 2021. This memorandum is intended to provide guidance regarding the administration of the General Assistance (GA) program as we end the civil-emergency caused by the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic.

SFY 20 Executive Order 29 requires that changes enacted by the Executive Order (EO) remain in effect for 30 days following the end of the CSE. This means the Executive Order changes must continue through July 30, 2021. Whereas July 31 falls on a Saturday, the first business day that the Executive Order will no longer be in effect will be August 2, 2021.

Changes following the end of the GA Executive Order:

Extension of Eligibility Periods

Changes in EO29 allowed for a temporary maximum period of eligibility of sixty days. This change allowed municipalities to determine eligibility for up to two months at a time with the goal of easing capacity limitations and allowing for social distancing by not requiring people to physically visit municipality offices as frequently. Eligibility duration will revert back to a maximum of 30 days per application (22 MRSA, Ch 1161, §4301 (7)).

Just Cause for Work Requirements

All work-related requirements shall be re-instated. This includes requirements such as job searches, attendance at job fairs, attendance at any free class or course available to the client that would aid them in their search for employment, such as high school equivalency courses, resume writing, job searching, or interviewing workshops available at any local agency or through a local Career Center. An applicant is ineligible for assistance for 120 days in all municipalities in the State when any municipality establishes that the applicant without just cause refuses; to search for employment, register for work, accept a suitable job offer, participate in any training, education or rehabilitation program that would assist the applicant in securing employment, or refuses to perform or willfully fails to perform a job assigned to them, or willfully performs a job assigned below the average standards of that job.

As was policy prior to the Executive Order, a valid, verifiable reason that hinders an individual in complying with one or more conditions of eligibility, such as lack of transportation, illness or hospitalization, or any other reason beyond control of the applicant, will be considered Just Cause for failure to complete a requirement. The main difference will be that whereas during the Civil State of Emergency, the requirement would have been

waived, with the end of the Executive Order, the client may be assisted but shall still be required to “make-up” that requirement as a condition of future eligibility (22 MRSA, Ch 1161, §4316-A).

Expansion of Determination of an Emergency

This Executive Order change allowed municipalities to exceed the maximums when deemed necessary by the municipality to house individuals. It also required administrators to take applications as soon as possible, as opposed to advising a client they must wait several days for an application to be taken. The main goal was to eliminate all potential delays to securing housing, especially at a time when isolation was a matter of public health. As the Executive Order ends, only those situations defined in GA statute will qualify as an emergency application. Emergency assistance is intended to be a temporary amount of assistance in order to cure or prevent an emergency. Eligibility is limited to the budgeted Unmet Need allowance of a GA applicant and Administrators may only exceed that amount in order to cure or prevent an emergency, pursuant to the rules of the Maine General Assistance Manual (CMR 10-144, Ch 323; 22 M.R.S. §4301).

Tribal Reimbursements

Reimbursement for Maine Tribes was temporarily increased to 100% during the Civil State of Emergency. The amount of reimbursement Maine Tribes may receive will return to 70% for any assistance issued on behalf of an eligible applicant after the 30th day following the end of the Civil State of Emergency.

Stimulus Funds and the Child Tax Credit

Executive Order 29-A allowed for the disregard of federal stimulus payments during the determination of General Assistance eligibility. There is no end date for EO29-A, and federal stimulus funds made available during the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to be considered unavailable to General Assistance applicants when determining eligibility for General Assistance benefits.

The Advanced Child Tax Credit, which is expected to be released in monthly payments beginning July 2021, is considered an advanced tax payment, and is not considered a stimulus payment. The Child Tax Credit will be countable income for General Assistance applicants. Applicants can “opt-out” of these monthly payments and may choose to do if child custody arrangements determine that the applicant is not eligible to claim their child during 2021 tax filing.

Updates

Updates from the Department of Health and Human Services will be provided as they become available. Department staff will continue to be available to answer emails and phone calls to the GA Hotline. For information on other DHHS programs please visit: www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofi

For questions concerning the eligibility of an applicant, or to report changes regarding hours of operation or contact information for your afterhours overseer, please contact the General Assistance Hotline at 1-800-442-6003.

Thank you,



Sara Denson, General Assistance Program Manager
Maine Department of Health and Human Services