

Janet T. Mills  
Governor

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.  
Commissioner



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**SUBJECT:** GA Guidance During the COVID-19 Civil Emergency  
**TO:** Municipalities providing General Assistance  
**DATE:** April 1, 2020

Dear Municipal Officer:

This memorandum is intended to provide guidance regarding the administration of the General Assistance (GA) program during the civil-emergency caused by the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic, as authorized by Governor Janet T. Mills, in Executive Order 29, on March 31, 2020.

### **Extension of Eligibility Periods**

Changes allow for a temporary maximum period of eligibility of sixty days. The period of eligibility shall not exceed sixty days during this civil emergency. Benefit issuance shall clearly state the allowed usage dates, and vouchers shall be issued separately for each month of prospective eligibility. For example, an applicant who requires assistance for food and is deemed eligible for April and May shall be given a food voucher clearly marked with dates for shopping in April, and a separate food voucher clearly marked with dates for shopping in May.

### **Just Cause for Work Requirements**

The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has caused the closure of many businesses throughout Maine. General Assistance applicants may find it difficult or unsafe to work or search for work at this time. General Assistance administrators shall treat the state of civil emergency as just cause for provision of General Assistance benefits without requiring compliance with the work search requirements. General Assistance applicants who have been denied eligibility due to incomplete work requirements or inability to fulfil a work requirement shall have eligibility determined without penalties for failure to comply with previously assigned work requirements when the applicant has a current application for General Assistance, and reports that the failure to regain compliance is for a COVID-19 related reason.

### **Expansion of Determination of an Emergency**

Applications for General Assistance which are made during a civil emergency, such as the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), shall be considered emergency applications for the purpose of determine eligibility and administering assistance for basic necessities during a civil emergency. An emergency, as defined by 22 M.R.S. §4301 is a situation beyond the control of the applicant. Administrators, during a civil emergency, shall presume eligibility for all applicants when that applicant is not able to provide full verification of eligibility at the time of application and may exceed the maximum levels of assistance in order to cure or prevent an emergency, pursuant to the rules of the Maine General Assistance Manual, CMR 10-144, Ch 323.

### **Tribal Reimbursements**

Tribal members living on Tribal land have higher rates of poverty and unemployment than the counties in which they are located, as well as greater health disparities than non-Tribal members, resulting in greater vulnerability during the COVID-19 pandemic. Requests for reimbursement of the direct costs of General Assistance benefits will be provided at 100% of the benefits paid by Maine Tribes.

### **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](http://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 Russell, General Assistance Program Manager  
Maine Department of Health and Human Services