

Maine Municipal Association

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To: Municipal Officials

From: Kate Dufour

Date: September 18, 2008

Re: Emergency General Assistance for 2008 Winter Season

Attached please find a letter from Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Commissioner, Brenda Harvey, regarding the issuance of emergency General Assistance (GA) for winter heating assistance. The Department requested that we share this memo with municipal managers and first selectmen.

The purpose of the memo is to alleviate concerns that municipalities may not be reimbursed for the heating assistance granted under the emergency provisions of the existing law, when the applicant is not eligible for "regular" GA; that is, the Department may not fully recognize real-life emergency situations.

As explained in the memo, Commissioner Harvey acknowledges that GA administrators may be utilizing the emergency assistance provision more frequently this winter to ensure that all eligible applicants are provided the heating assistance they need. According to Commissioner Harvey, as long as the GA administrator provides sufficient documentation regarding the provision of the emergency assistance, "the municipality will have no difficulty receiving reimbursement for the emergency assistance".

If you have any questions regarding this issue, please feel free to contact DHHS's Cindy Boyd at 1-800-442-6003.



Department of Health
and Human Services

Maine People Living
Safe, Healthy and Productive Lives

John E. Baldacci, Governor

Brenda M. Harvey, Commissioner

Department of Health and Human Services
Commissioner's Office
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September 9, 2008

Dear Municipal Welfare Director:

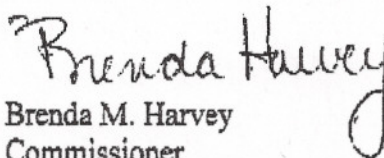
I am writing this letter in response to concerns voiced by both municipal welfare directors and other agencies working with low income clients regarding the anticipated increased need for help with winter heating. The Department of Health and Human Services is aware municipalities may see an increase in the number of General Assistance applications and the amount of "unmet need," due to the high cost of fuel. As has been stated in prior years, the Department knows some of the applicants will not be eligible for regular General Assistance, but may, depending on their situation, be granted assistance, based on the emergency provision in the General Assistance Program.

The Department realizes municipal welfare directors take the yearly audit conducted by the Department seriously, and there are those who are concerned the Department will not take into consideration the situation leading to more applications being granted under the emergency provision. Department of Health and Human Services General Assistance Policy page 29 provides the requirements of the review (audit) process. When a welfare director grants more than the maximum allowed, a narrative is necessary. If the emergency is a lack of fuel or the resources to obtain fuel, this fact needs to be noted. The auditor will know the welfare director is aware of the regular procedure and had a valid reason for treating a particular situation differently. If sufficiently documented, the municipality will have no difficulty receiving reimbursement for the emergency General Assistance was properly granted. Further, there is no limit on the number of consecutive months in which an emergency may be found to exist, by the welfare director, as long as emergency circumstances actually exist and are sufficiently documented in the General Assistance record.

The Department is also aware many municipalities have extra resources to help the citizens of their community with their heating needs and some welfare directors manage those funds, as well as the General Assistance Program. We applaud you for all your hard work.

If you have any questions, please contact Cindy Boyd at 1-800-442-6003.

Sincerely,


Brenda M. Harvey
Commissioner

BMH/klv