

Assistance will be granted for a period of time that is no longer than one month, although it may be granted for shorter periods, such as a week at a time. If a month has gone by since your last application and you need additional assistance, you must reapply and show the administrator that you are eligible.

If you need GA, make sure your request is for help with current bills. GA does not usually pay for back bills. Also it is important to remember to apply for assistance before you have a crisis. If you receive a notice that your electricity is going to be shut off, or if you are going to be evicted, notify the administrator immediately. You also are responsible for checking your fuel supply, whether it is an oil tank or a wood pile. If you don't check your fuel and then run out, the administrator will not necessarily consider it an emergency beyond your control and individuals causing their own "emergency" may be found ineligible to receive GA.

Liens & Repayment

You should be aware that if you receive GA, you are required to repay the municipality when you become financially able to do so.

If the municipality makes a mortgage payment or pays for a capital improvement to your property, it may place a lien on your property in the Registry of Deeds.

There is also an automatic lien against any Workers' Compensation lump sum payment that you may receive. This Workers' Compensation lien captures any General Assistance you have received after January 1, 1992.

In addition, there is a process in place that is effectively a lien against any future Supplemental Security Income (SSI) retroactive benefit you may receive. If you have applied for SSI, the administrator will ask you to sign an agreement form that will result in the municipality (and the Department of Human Services) being paid back for all the GA issued to you after you applied for SSI. If you refuse to sign this form, you will be denied General Assistance. The money to repay the municipality and DHS is taken from your SSI retroactive benefit if you should get such an SSI benefit in the future.

Note: The monetary value of GA workfare performed is deducted from both SSI and Workers' Compensation liens a municipality may hold, reducing the amount you must repay.

What To Do If You Are Not Satisfied

If you do not agree with the administrator's decision, you can ask for further explanation. If you still disagree, you can appeal the decision to the fair hearing authority (FHA). The FHA may be one person or a small board made up of three or five people. No member of the FHA will have participated in the decision on your request for assistance.

You must request the hearing in writing within 5 working days of receiving your decision. After you make such a request, a hearing will be scheduled within 5 working days. An attorney may represent you at the hearing at your own expense. At the hearing, you should be prepared to explain why you think an error has been made regarding your application (e.g., why you are eligible for GA).

At the fair hearing, you will have the right to tell your side of the story and also question witnesses. You will receive a written decision from the fair hearing authority no later than 5 working days after the hearing. If you are dissatisfied with the fair hearing authority's decision, you have 30 days to appeal to Superior Court.

If you are in immediate need and you think the municipality has violated the state law with regard to your request for assistance, you may call the Department of Human Services to complain. The Department's hot-line number is **1(800) 442-6003**.

Confidentiality

The information concerning your request for assistance, including the application, budget sheet, decision and other information regarding your case is strictly confidential. You, your attorney, the administrator and certain government personnel may review your records, but the general public may not review your records unless you have given your express permission.

SUMMARY

GA is intended to help people who are in need and have nowhere else to turn. GA is a program of last resort. The municipality has the responsibility to provide assistance to eligible people who are in need. Applicants have the responsibility to:

- provide complete and accurate information;
- provide written documentation of expenses (bills, receipts, etc.);
- notify the administrator if there are any changes in circumstances which affect eligibility (income, household members, etc.);
- use income for basic necessities (food, heating fuel, rent/mortgage, utilities, medicine);
- make every effort to use potential resources, including other government benefit programs, private pension programs, support payments, trust funds, etc.;
- attempt to find and accept full-time work, if able-bodied;
- not quit work or get fired for misconduct;
- participate in an education or training program to assist employability;
- sell your non-essential assets at fair market price (vehicles, boats, real estate, etc.);
- find affordable housing within your ability to pay;
- request assistance with bills that are current (due that month), not back bills;
- check heating fuel supply (oil, wood, gas) on a regular basis and request GA before fuel runs out;
- notify the administrator immediately upon the receipt of a "shut off" notice, before utilities are disconnected;
- tell the truth; and
- reimburse the municipality for any assistance received, once financially able.

If you have questions about GA or your application, contact:

Municipality: _____
 GA Administrator: _____
 Telephone Number: (207) _____
 GA Office Hours:
 Day: _____ Hours: _____
 Day: _____ Hours: _____
 Day: _____ Hours: _____

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GENERAL ASSISTANCE

Applicant Rights & Responsibilities

The General Assistance (GA) program in Maine is administered by each municipality in order to provide immediate help to eligible people who do not have enough money for basic needs, such as rent/mortgage, food, heating fuel, medications, non-elective medical care and other items that are essential to maintain themselves or their families. In order to receive GA, people must follow program rules and meet the eligibility conditions.

This brochure contains general information about GA. This brochure is not intended to cover all the rules of the program. If you would like more information, ask the GA administrator in your municipality to show you a copy of the ordinance.

HOW TO APPLY

In order to receive assistance, you must apply in person and fill out an application. If for some special reason that is not possible, you must get a friend, relative, or some other authorized representative to apply for you. You should visit the town office or city hall where you live, or call the GA administrator to find out when and where you may apply. If your situation is not life threatening, you may be expected to make an appointment or apply only on certain days.

When you apply, you will be asked to give the administrator information necessary to determine your eligibility. You will be asked for your household income, expenses, and the number of people in your household. You will also be asked to show the administrator proof of your expenses including food, rent/mortgage, heating fuel, electricity, water/sewer, medical expenses, and so on. Remember, without complete information about your income and expenses, the administrator can't determine if you are eligible.

What To Bring With You When You Apply:

- your most recent bills and/or other proof of expenses including: rent/mortgage, heating fuel, electricity, food, medical expenses;
- cancelled checks, receipts, or other documents that show how you have spent your money and income the past 30 days;