

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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To: Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

From: General Assistance Migration Task Force

Date: January 12, 2006

Subject: Report requested by the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services to examine the extent and reasons for migration among recipients of TANF and general assistance

Introduction

On February 23, 2005, the legislature's Health and Human Services Committee wrote a letter to the Commissioner of Health and Human Services requesting that:

- 1) The Department invite the TANF Advisory Council and the Health and Human Services Committee to participate in all meetings of the general assistance committee that was established pursuant to Resolves 2003, Chapter 116, and
- 2) The general assistance committee, with the participation of the invitees reference above: (a) examine the extent of and reasons for migration among recipients of TANF and general assistance and (b) report its findings and recommendations, including recommendations for future data collection, as part of the committee's final report which is due January 15, 2006.

Findings

The Committee looked at programs administered by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), including the TANF, MaineCare and Food Stamp Programs and general assistance programs administered by the Cities of Bangor, Biddeford, Lewiston and Portland. It makes the following findings with respect to the charge described above.

1. Programs administered by DHHS through the Office of Integrated Access and Support—TANF, MaineCare and Food Stamps.

The Office of Integrated Access and Support was able to provide the following information related to the programs it administered including the TANF, MaineCare and Food Stamp Programs:

- **Fewer than 1% of all recipients of TANF, Food Stamps and MaineCare have relocated to Maine from another state.** This point-in-time data developed from an analysis of all persons receiving TANF, Food Stamps and MaineCare on April 19, 2005, found that within the total

unduplicated caseload for these programs of 289,120 just 1,068 cases (or .0095%) represented families or individuals who relocated to Maine from another State at any time in the past¹

- **More than 7 times as many families and individuals receiving assistance leave Maine monthly than relocate here from another state.** During the period between October 2002 and April 2005:
 - An average of 243 food stamp, MaineCare and TANF cases were closed monthly as a result of the family or individual *moving out of Maine*.
 - An average of only 33 new cases were opened each month as a result of families or individuals *moving into Maine* who began receiving assistance.
 - Throughout this period there was a total out-migration of 7,519 families or individuals who had been receiving assistance while 1,014 families or individuals entered Maine and began receiving assistance.
- **Approximately one-third of those receiving assistance that reported relocating to Maine from another state were, in fact, issued their Social Security number in Maine.** This indicates that some percentage of these individuals was simply returning home to Maine from another state.
- **The migration pattern of persons receiving assistance in Maine closely approximates the migration pattern of Maine's general population.**

Relocation patterns of persons receiving assistance: Based on data provided by the Department of Health and Human Services:

- Forty-three percent (43%) of all families and individuals relocating to Maine and receiving assistance came from another New England State;
- The two next most frequent states that people relocated from were Florida (10%) and California (4%).

Relocation patterns of Maine residents generally: The U.S. census tracks the movement of citizens from one state to another. It maintains a data file identifying the state in which individuals live at the time the census was taken and where they lived five years prior to that. At the time of the 2000 census:

- 1,193,651 individuals five years old and over were living in Maine; 9%, or 107,999, of these individuals lived in a different state in 1995.
- Thirty-nine percent of those living in a different state in 1995 lived in another New England state with the next highest numbers living in Florida (8%) and California (5%).

The following table illustrates the strong similarity in migration patterns between those relocating to Maine and receiving public assistance and the public generally. There is no variation in the patterns of movement between welfare and non-welfare families that would suggest a different motive for their relocation decision, such as the desire to increase their public benefits. If such a

¹ The Office of Integrated Access and Support administers many other programs in addition to TANF, Food Stamps, and MaineCare and these households may have received from one of these programs.

pattern did exist there would likely be a greater difference between the two groups with evidence of families receiving assistance leaving states with lower benefit levels than Maine's.

	People who relocated to Maine <i>and</i> received public assistance ²	All people who relocated to Maine from another State between 1995 and 2000 ³
Other New England states	467 (43%)	42,086 (39%)
Florida	105 (10%)	8,342 (8%)
California	40 (4%)	5,397 (5%)

2. General Assistance

The vast majority of Maine's 492 municipalities manage their own General Assistance programs in accordance with State law and municipal ordinances. During the 2005 fiscal year, the municipalities assisted 34,965 households. The total amount of assistance given was \$8,690,503. While the State shares in some of the cost of providing assistance to eligible individuals, municipalities receive no state assistance for costs associated with administering the program. While municipalities must keep records of the type and amount of assistance provided to individuals they are not required to maintain data on the characteristics of individuals receiving assistance. Nevertheless some municipalities do collect some data that has been useful to the committee.

The committee reviewed data from the Cities of Bangor, Biddeford, Lewiston and Portland. These four cities represent approximately 60% of all general assistance expenditures in the State. Since each of these municipalities collect data using their own unique systems, it is not possible to combine their responses to present a single uniform picture. Rather, what we are able to present is only a snapshot of the experience of each of these municipalities.

At the outset, it is essential to note that the experience of each of these Cities is strongly influenced by the fact that they are large service center communities. Their experience with respect to relocation is *not* representative of the experience of the vast majority of other municipalities in Maine. Portland, Lewiston and Bangor are the major service center communities in the State. These cities are not only home to most of Maine's jobs and commerce; they also host the overwhelming share of our state's medical facilities, institutions of higher learning, and social services. For this reason, these cities attract a greatly disproportionate number of persons relocating from both within and outside of Maine.

In addition, in recent years the cities of Portland and Lewiston have become home to relatively large numbers of immigrants and refugees. Each year a diverse population of refugees resettles in Maine directly from their countries of origin through the state-federal resettlement agency, Catholic Charities Maine. Others come to Maine as so-called "secondary migrants."

² This data is derived from information provided during the interview process and indicates only that people receiving assistance relocated to Maine at some point in time (or were returning home after leaving the state). It does not reflect any relationship between the relocation and the application for assistance.

³ All people relocating to Maine from another State between 1995 and 2000 may also include some of those noted in the first column who relocated to Maine and received assistance if their relocation occurred between 1995 and 2000.

The majority of immigrants (80%) seen at the City of Portland's Refugee Service Program are "secondary migrants." This is also the case in the City of Lewiston, which has seen 666 new families since February 2001. These individuals moved to Portland and Lewiston on their own from other U.S. cities, typically in search of greater employment opportunity, more affordable housing, safer neighborhoods, or to be closer to friends or family. Many secondary migrants arrive in Maine without resources or support services speaking little or no English and with no housing arrangements.

We use the term "secondary migrant" here in its' colloquial sense, meaning simply those who moved from their original location in this country at any time after that. In its' strict legal sense the term "secondary migrant" means individuals who are placed for resettlement initially in one location in the U.S. and who decide to relocate to another part of the country during their first eight months in the country. Special refugee resettlement benefits, including case management and employment assistance, are available through the federal government to refugees during those first eight months in the country, and can follow secondary refugees to their new location to be distributed through a successor refugee agency within that time period. However, it has been the experience of both Portland and Lewiston that once refugees leave their initial host location it has not been possible to get these critically needed funds transferred to the successor agency here in Maine.

Here is a snapshot of the findings from data provided by each of these four municipalities:

A. A snapshot of general assistance activity related to families or individuals relocating to or within Maine:

Portland gathered data showing its experiences with *out-of-state intakes* for the one-year period between September 2004 and August 2005. (An "intake" in Portland means an initial inquiry made about assistance and may or may not result in an actual application for assistance.)

- Portland conducted a total of 2,225 intakes during this time period.
- Of that total, 274 (12%) were from households relocating from another state.
- Sixty-nine (25%) of all out-of-state intakes were from refugees or immigrants.
- Assistance was granted to 65% of these applicants coming from out-of-state.
- Approximately 19% of the total intakes were referred to other services during the intake process.

Lewiston provided data for the number of unduplicated cases for which assistance was provided during the one-year period between July 2004 and June 2005. During this period:

- The city assisted 548 unduplicated cases.
- Of that total number of cases assisted, 150 (27%) had relocated from another state.
- Of those relocated and assisted, 88 (59%) were refugees or immigrants.

Bangor provided information from its transitional housing program only, not its overall general assistance program.

- This program has received a total of 2,275 applications for housing services.
- Of that total, 2,108 (93%) were from Maine and 167 (7%) were from people relocating to Maine from out-of-state.

Biddeford provided data on the number of contacts made to its general assistance program for the one-year period between July 2004 and June 2005. A “contact” is an inquiry made to the general assistance program by a person seeking assistance; it may or may not result in an actual application for assistance.

- The City received a total of 371 contacts during this time period.
- Of that total, 45 (12%) came from persons relocating from out-of-state.
- *None* of these contacts from out-of-state individuals resulted in an actual application for assistance, and *no* assistance was granted to any of the individuals.

Biddeford’s general assistance administrator attributes the lack of assistance provided to this group to the fact that the housing market for affordable rental housing was very limited during this period and that some of those inquiring about assistance were concerned that the program rules, including the voucher-only provision, was too inflexible. Maine law requires that general assistance be provided in the form of a voucher, not cash, as is the case in many other states.

Experience with intrastate migration. Finally, it should be noted that there is migration to these service center locales from other municipalities *within the State* as well as from outside of Maine.

- **Bangor** data shows that 22% of applicants for their transitional housing program were from another municipality in Maine.
- **Portland** also receives requests for assistance monthly from persons relocating within Maine. This group represents approximately 6% of all intakes.

B. Reasons for relocation to Maine

The reasons given for moving to Maine by persons applying for General Assistance are generally consistent with those of all persons moving within the United States. According to the United States Bureau of the Census⁴ citizens within the United States moving beyond the county in which they were living moved principally for the following reasons:

- Housing related (31.9%);
- Work-related moves (31.1%);
- Family-related reasons (26.9%); and
- Other (10.1%).

The Census further found that persons with higher educational levels were more likely to move for work-related reasons, while those with lower educational levels were more likely to move for family-related reasons.

This is very similar to what the committee found when reviewing data from Portland and Lewiston. In both of those municipalities housing, family and employment-related reasons were also those most frequently given for relocating by those seeking general assistance.

⁴ *People on the Move: Geographic Mobility 1999-2000, Chapter 3.* Population Profile of the United States: 2000 (internet release); U.S. Census Bureau.

The data provided by the cities of Portland and Lewiston was collected directly from applicants and was based on their self-declaration. Because there was some lack of uniformity in the way the data was coded it is not possible to combine the results from these two municipalities.

Lewiston. The most commonly reported reasons for relocation to the City of Lewiston between July 2004 and June 2005 were as follows:

- Family-related—91 cases (28%)
- Employment related—71 cases (22%)
- Affordable housing—61 cases (19%)
- Quality of life—27 cases (8%)

For Lewiston other reasons included refugee-related (14 cases or 4%); moving to be near a friend (14 cases or 4%); education (12 cases or 4%); health-related (9 cases or 3%); and fleeing domestic violence (5 cases or 2%). The remaining 6% included a number of miscellaneous reasons or cases for which no information was available. Only five individuals indicated that they came to Lewiston seeking assistance and three of those five indicated that they were seeking low-income housing assistance which could simply mean that they were seeking an affordable housing market where they could use their portable federal housing voucher.

Portland. The most commonly reported reasons for relocation to the City of Portland between July 2004 and June 2005 were as follows:

- Employment-related—61 cases (22%)
- Family-related—40 cases (15%)
- Quality of life—41 cases (15%)

For Portland other reasons were coded as “relocate to area” (30 cases or 11%); refugee-related (24 cases or 9%); seeking substance abuse treatment (20 cases or 7%); friends in the area (12 cases or 4%); fleeing domestic violence (8 cases or 3%); health-related (7 cases or 3%); seeking housing (4 cases or 1%); education (2 cases or 1%). The remaining 9% included a number of miscellaneous responses or cases for which no information was available. Only four individuals indicated that they came to Portland seeking help and there was no further designation of the type of assistance they were seeking.

Recommendations

In view of the information presented above, the committee has reached the following conclusions and offers the following recommendations:

- 1) **We found no evidence of a pattern of individuals coming to Maine to take advantage of public assistance programs; no further data collection is recommended at this time.** In fact, to the contrary, the overall percentage of individuals relocating from another state and requesting assistance in two of Maine’s largest service center communities was relatively small (Lewiston 5%; Portland 12%). The states that they came from are the same states as those from which all other new Mainer’s have relocated. These individuals come from those states in roughly the same proportion. Finally, the reasons that individual seeking assistance give are consistent with the reasons given by all other persons relocating to Maine.

Once again it is important to note that these service center municipalities have a substantially different experience with persons relocating than other municipalities in the State.

Data from the Office of Integrated Access and Support shows that at any point in time less than 1% of its combined cases for the TANF, MaineCare and Food Stamp Programs represent individuals or families who had come from another state at any previous time. One-third of these individuals coming from another state had a social security number originating in Maine indicating that many may likely have simply been returning home. Finally more than seven times as many individuals and families receiving assistance leave Maine every month than come here and apply for assistance.

As noted above municipalities receive no funding from the Department of Health and Human Services to administer the general assistance program. Any additional data collection could increase the cost of the Program's administration, which would fall on the municipalities.

In view of the findings from existing data that there is no evidence of persons moving to Maine to take advantage of public programs, and the cost associated with additional data collection by the municipalities, the committee does not recommend any further action at this time. If the Legislature wishes a more definitive study on this question a more comprehensive and scientific study would be necessary. Resources would be required for such a study. The committee cautions that such a study would require careful development of a methodology to ensure that it is fairly and appropriately conducted.

- 2) **The cities of Lewiston and Portland have both had significant difficulty accessing the federal help necessary to assist secondary migrants resulting in additional cost to these municipalities. The committee recommends that the Health and Human Services Committee support efforts to gain additional federal funding to enable these municipalities to serve this group of citizens.**

As noted above, it has been very difficult, with respect to secondary migrants, for the successor refugee resettlement agency in Maine to access any special refugee assistance on behalf of this group of individuals.

In 2000 the Cities of Portland and Lewiston sought and received a grant from the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) allowing them to hire multilingual staff to assist the newly arrived secondary migrant refugees in need of immediate and short-term services. These services included case management; assistance with employment; and cultural skills training designed to improve stability, independence and overall quality of life. Based on the success of this program federal funds were renewed through January 2005. However, the last two grant applications to ORR were not successful.

Limited services have continued with funds from the Maine social services block grant. However, without needed support from the federal government secondary migrants will be left without critically needed services including housing and employment. Moreover, because there is no other program in the State that provides comprehensive financial assistance to these families and individuals, the General Assistance programs in municipalities where secondary migrants live will be responsible for providing needed financial and case management assistance to them without adequate federal funding.

The committee recommends that the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services write a letter to the federal ORR with copies to our congressional delegation urging greater support for secondary

migrants in Maine. The committee also recommends that the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services write a letter to the new Office of Immigrant and Multicultural Services urging the need for great support for secondary migrants in Maine be a priority of this new office.