

F. Special Assistant to the Public Advocate, salary range 20.

The employees listed in this subsection serve at the pleasure of the Public Advocate and are confidential employees. All other employees of the Public Advocate are subject to the Civil Service Law.

~~The Public Advocate may, at the Public Advocate's discretion, substitute an Economic Analyst position at salary range 36 for any vacant Senior Counsel position. The Public Advocate also may compensate one or more Senior Counsels at salary range 37 if, in the judgment of the Public Advocate, an increase is necessary to provide competitive salary levels.~~

## PART Q

Sec. Q-1. 5 MRSA §1591, sub-§5 is enacted to read:

~~**5. Executive Department.** The Executive Department shall carry forward any General Fund balances remaining in the Administration - Executive - Governor's Office program, the Blaine House program, the Governor's Office of Communications program, the Office of Policy and Management program and the Governor's Energy Office program at the end of any fiscal year for use in the next fiscal year.~~

## PART R

Enacted GA changes (2012)

Sec. R-1. 22 MRSA §4305, sub-§3-C is enacted to read:

**3-C. Maximum level of assistance from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013.** Notwithstanding subsection 3-A or 3-B, for the period from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013, the maximum level of assistance is 90% of the maximum level of assistance in effect on April 1, 2012.

Sec. R-2. 22 MRSA §4308, sub-§§1-A and 1-B are enacted to read:

**1-A. Limit on housing assistance.** Except as provided in subsections 1-B and 2, housing assistance provided pursuant to this chapter is limited to a maximum of 9 months during the period from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013.

**1-B. Extension of housing assistance due to hardship.** An applicant is eligible for housing assistance under this chapter beyond the limit established in subsection 1-A if the applicant has a severe and persistent mental or physical condition warranting such an extension or has an application for assistance pending with the federal Social Security Administration.

**Sec. R-3. Temporary reduction in 90% general assistance reimbursement.** Notwithstanding the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 22, section 4311, subsection 1, for the period from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013, the state reimbursement rate pursuant to the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 22, section 4311, subsection 1 is reduced to 85% for a municipality that incurs net general assistance costs in a fiscal year in excess of .0003 of that municipality's most recent state valuation.



**Sec. R-4. General assistance working group.** The Commissioner of Health and Human Services or the commissioner's designee shall convene a working group to review and make recommendations related to the general assistance program under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 22, chapter 1161, referred to in this section as "the general assistance program." The commissioner or the commissioner's designee shall convene the first meeting of the working group no later than June 1, 2012.

**1. Members.** The working group consists of 9 members, 7 of whom are voting members and 2 of whom are nonvoting members.

A. The commissioner, or the commissioner's designee, serves as a voting member of the working group. The commissioner shall appoint the following 6 additional voting members: the director of the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Family Independence; one member of a statewide organization representing Maine municipalities; one member of a statewide organization representing Maine municipal welfare directors; one member from a municipality in the State that has a program to assist recipients of general assistance in applying for federal supplemental security income benefits; one member of an advocacy organization representing the interests of recipients of general assistance with expertise in policy and legal matters related to public benefit programs; and the executive director of the Maine State Housing Authority or the executive director's designee.

B. The commissioner shall appoint the following 2 nonvoting members of the working group: one person with knowledge of cash or medical assistance benefits provided by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs; and one person with knowledge of affordable housing programs and other opportunities to increase the supply of affordable housing in Maine.

The working group may create subgroups to work on specific issues or initiatives and may include individuals who are not working group members.

**2. Duties.** In developing its recommendations under this section, the working group shall:

A. Review and propose suggestions for electronic data exchange between municipalities and the Department of Health and Human Services to increase efficiency in verifying general assistance program eligibility and improving program integrity;

B. Examine the structure of the general assistance program and recommend methods and standards to improve accountability, cost-effectiveness and uniformity in the program;

C. Review the role of the general assistance program in funding homeless shelter services and develop recommendations regarding whether the Department of Health and Human Services or the Maine State Housing Authority is the more appropriate state agency to operate and administer the general assistance program and to operate and administer housing assistance benefits under the general assistance program;

D. Evaluate the appropriateness and the necessity of limiting general assistance benefits to persons receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program benefits and persons under sanction in that program;

E. Review the pilot program established by the commissioner pursuant to this Part and make any recommendations necessary to improve the success of the pilot program; and

F. Develop proposed legislation designed to achieve \$500,000 in General Fund savings from January 1, 2013 to June 30, 2013 and improve the efficiency, effectiveness, uniformity and financial accountability of the general assistance program.

**3. Report.** No later than December 1, 2012, the Commissioner of Health and Human Services shall submit the report and recommendations developed pursuant to this section, including any suggested legislation, to the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.

**Sec. R-5. General assistance pilot program.** The Commissioner of Health and Human Services shall establish a pilot program designed to further the objectives of the working group established in this Part and to reduce General Fund costs and costs of the general assistance program under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 22, chapter 1161 by maximizing access to federal assistance programs for which applicants for or recipients of general assistance may be eligible. Under the pilot program, the 7 limited-period Family Independence Specialist positions established in Part A shall work to maximize and expedite the award of federal supplemental security income benefits for recipients of general assistance and to identify and assist veterans who receive assistance through programs administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Family Independence who may be eligible for cash or medical assistance from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to obtain those benefits. On or before June 30, 2013, the commissioner shall submit a report regarding the operations and effect of the pilot program to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over appropriations and financial affairs and to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over health and human services matters.

## PART S

**Sec. S-1. 22 MRSA §3762, sub-§8, ¶D,** as enacted by PL 2007, c. 539, Pt. XX, §2, is repealed.

**Sec. S-2. 22 MRSA §3762, sub-§8, ¶F** is enacted to read:

F. The department may provide limited transitional food benefits to meet the needs of food supplement benefit recipients living with one or more dependent children under 18 years of age who are working at least 30 hours per week or who are working at least 20 hours per week if one or more dependent child is under 6 years of age. The benefit may not exceed \$50 per month per family.