



**City of Portland, Maine  
Health & Human Services Department  
Kristen Dow, Director**

**Social Services Division  
Aaron Geyer, Administrator**

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO: Portland City Councilors**  
**FROM: Aaron Geyer, Social Services Administrator**  
**Sara, Fleurant, Director of Oxford Street Shelter**  
**DATE: January 27, 2020**  
**RE: Staff Response to January 13<sup>th</sup> City Council Workshop Questions**

**Council Question: How do other municipalities meet their General Assistance obligations without a shelter?**

Below is information other General Assistance administrators sent to me about their practices. Most municipalities staff have spoken with acknowledge homelessness as an emergency and will refer to homeless shelters throughout the state and others will utilize hotels for a duration. However, both of these resources are limited with some communities having no nearby shelters or hotels that will accept GA vouchers.

- Bangor
  - Maintains a close relationship with both area shelters and use GA funds to pay per bed night for eligible guests.
    - Shelter staff members take the GA application and we review them weekly.
    - Based on our review we issue vouchers to those who are eligible.
  - If someone presents at either of the shelters, Bangor GA presumes they are their responsibility and will pay provided clients meet the income eligibility requirements.
  - Neither shelter has a set-aside for GA referrals, and both are usually full when contacted.
  - Bangor GA paid for hotels in the past, but due to a large number of cases where clients caused damages, there are no longer have any hotels that will accept GA vouchers.

- They used to get hotel requests daily, but the word is out that clients no longer have that option making it rare for people to ask. Those who do ask seem to find other options when told a hotel stay isn't possible.
- There have been a couple of occasions when Bangor GA paid to put someone in a taxi to the shelter in Ellsworth; Bangor GA always contacted Ellsworth GA informing them of this.
  
- Biddeford
  - If someone presents for GA and is in need of shelter, an application for GA is taken; however, it is the client's responsibility to locate housing.
  - If eligible, GA would then pay for the housing that the client locates which in some cases, is a hotel.
  - Biddeford does not have a shelter and does not have a relationship with any local shelter.
  
- Sanford
  - Treats homelessness – or the risk of homelessness – as an emergency when taking GA applications. However, even for those eligible for emergency assistance, resources are severely limited.
  - Sanford will use a hotel, but there is only one hotel that accepts GA vouchers and only on a per night basis. That limits help to only a few days before the applicant is back on the street.
  - They have a great relationship with York County Shelter Programs, Inc., but there is no way to do a direct referral as they are normally at full capacity.
    - Clients are advised to call every morning and afternoon as that is the only way to be on the front burner when a space opens.
    - When someone does call regularly, the turnaround can be pretty quick.
    - Calls to YCSPI are required every morning and afternoon as a condition of future eligibility when someone is placed in a hotel.
    - A hotel stay is also used as a bridge to a known opening at YCSPI (there can often be a gap of a few days before shelter entry) for those who are eligible.
  - It is difficult to address this issue due to the substantial shortage of available housing in Sanford combined with the lack of short-term solutions.
  - Those placed in a hotel for a few days are not returning to do another application.
    - The Sanford GA Administrator believes the biggest reason is those days provided are allowing the person to find longer term solutions without having the stress of finding a place to stay each night.
  
- Westbrook
  - Works with clients in identifying other available resources and as a last resort does provide some assistance with a hotel for a limited period of time.

- Assistance is usually based on the overall GA eligibility, although they have found it extremely difficult to find hotels/motels willing to work with GA due to a host of different reasons.
- Westbrook GA will reach out to York county shelter, Florence house, Hope Haven in Lewiston, Tedford shelter in Brunswick, the Teen shelter in Portland and they do accept clients if there's availability.
- Westbrook GA has always been open to working with area shelters and one great working relationship that they have is with the Family Shelter in Portland.
  - The Family Shelter Program Manager calls whenever a Westbrook family presents at the shelter in Portland and they work together to try to resolve the issue.
  - The Family Shelter could also bill Westbrook GA if it's determined that a GA eligible Westbrook family stayed at the shelter.

**Question: What are the turn away police for other Maine Shelters?**

MaineHousing received turn away policies submitted to them anonymously from shelters around the state. They are listed below:

- **Shelter 1-**
  - Referred to other local shelters.
  - During the winter time we are able to accommodate an overflow with five mats on the floor.
  - We are starting an overnight Warming Center during the upcoming winter.
- **Shelter 2 -**
  - Clients will call, walk in or get dropped off looking for shelter
  - Client should be informed if the shelter is full Immediately
  - Then offered to complete the Questionnaire with them Explain the purpose of the questionnaire Explain the Call List Process
  - Complete the Questionnaire and add them to the Shelter Call List Explain to the Client that they must call in daily to inform Staff that they are still in need of shelter If they do not have a phone- Refer them to the Library, the Main Office and to the Soup Kitchen.
  - Then refer them and provide them with the list of the Maine State Housing
  - Emergency Shelter Contact
  - Also provide them with the Emergency Resource Packet (The packet lists resources that they can contact for assistance with housing, food, clothes, rent, Case management, child Care, etc.)
- **Shelter 3-**
  - When shelter is full and it is likely that space will become available within 72 hours, eligible prospective residents are sheltered in a motel until shelter beds open up.
  - When shelter is full and it is unlikely that space will become available within 72 hours, and the individual/family is being sought/stalked by their batterer (i.e. is in danger of being found by an abuser intent on regaining control over the victim) a

referral will be made to another domestic violence shelter with available space and needed transportation to the receiving shelter is arranged by shelter.

- When shelter is full and it is unlikely that space will become available within 72 hours, and the victim is not being sought/stalked, nor in any danger of being found by the abuser (i.e. homeless as a result of domestic violence, but not at imminent risk from the abuser), the individual/family may be referred to a homeless shelter and will be provided with information about how to access other program resources that may be needed (e.g. individual advocacy and/or group support or legal services.)
- **Shelter 4-**
  - Once the Family Shelter is at capacity, we open a Warming Center for those families presenting. We do not turn away homeless families who are presenting, but if a family is clearly a resident of another Maine community, we will provide warming center while working with the other municipality to work on either reconnecting them to their local General Assistance (GA) or we will bill that local GA.
- **Shelter 5-**
  - The Shelter has the capacity to provide emergency shelter services for \_\_\_\_ individuals; with gender ratios often fluctuating which can affect capacity. This number includes the Community Overflow shelter which we operate and staff nightly. Staff work hard to proactively mitigate situations when receiving calls for shelter services because we are in fact over our original capacity every single night. The City has a longstanding commitment to meet the community's needs for homelessness when financial, staffing and space resources are available. We do work proactively with other shelter providers in the city to refer guests to other available and appropriate resources whenever possible regardless of capacity.
- **Shelter 6-**
  - A self-referral is completed with all calls for shelter entry and put on a waiting list. When a bed or family room becomes available the director will call to see if a (person or family is still homeless and offer them a bed or room.
- **Shelter 7-**
  - Primary navigator assists with exploring openings at other family shelters. If no space is available at other family shelters, or if family declines services from other shelters, Primary navigator explores all other options including GA, natural supports, or other community supports such as Safe Families or individual shelters. If the family accesses services or supports that do not include navigation services, shelter will offer to work with them under ESHAP Services Only. Within three days, Primary navigator will attempt a follow-up phone call to ensure connections have been made.
- **Shelter 8-**
  - Shelters are staffed Monday - Friday 8 am through 10 pm, including weekend coverage. Additionally, shelter has overnight most nights and flexible staffing as needed. Residents may always remain in the facility, regardless of staff presence. If our facilities are full and if emergency (shelter is needed, we may provide temporary accommodations at local motels in the area. In agreement with all the domestic violence resources across Maine, we will make warm referrals whenever

feasible to do so. When another dv shelter is not available, we work very closely with our regional (homeless shelter programs. In an innovative project, funded by Maine's STOP Violence Against Women Assistance Program provides a liaison advocate who works with residents and staff of homeless programs in Kennebec and Somerset counties. Many homeless participants have received advocacy services through this partnership.

- **Shelter 9-**

- If shelters are at capacity, assistance is provided in accessing other shelters. Such assistance includes the provision of contact information for other shelters as well as contact information for General Assistance and other safety net options. A waiting list is not maintained. Individuals are encouraged to call check back regularly for the availability of a bed.

- **Shelter 10-**

- Since we are the only emergency homeless shelter in our County for the general public, we attempt to shelter as many individuals and families as we can who contact us for help. Unfortunately, for safety reasons, we cannot provide shelter to everyone who contacts us. Whether the Shelter is full, or we are unable to admit an individual or family, our policy is the same: We offer to provide an "Unable to Shelter" letter which can be taken to their local municipality General Assistance office to obtain financial assistance. We also provide a list of other resources both inside and outside the community, including 211.

- **Shelter 11-**

- We have 3 emergency shelters and rarely are they all full. If one is full then we would refer the request to the next closest DV shelter.

- **Shelter 12-**

- Sadly, we are almost always full to capacity. We attempt to refer to other shelters
- with a warm hand off and transportation if/when possible. We attempt to work immediately with client-exploring together any existing natural positive supports that may suffice in the immediate/short term while we are working on housing options and case management. We do everything possible to accommodate life threatening situations/weather related/abuse risk/DV active cases with hotel rooms when possible. Regardless of shelter capacity, we accommodate clients with an initial face to face meeting. During that meeting we begin official intake paperwork and focus on the start of earning trust and building relationship. We attempt to immediately begin housing applications, provide for immediate basic human needs such as clothing, food, blankets, tents, transportation, laundry, showers, rides to interviews or important appointments for health/wellbeing and child related services. Our shelter operates 24/7 for residents is staffed 24/7. Our intake operations are available by appointment and/or walk in.

- **Shelter 13-**

- We attempt to assist the potential guest with locating an alternative placement at other shelters, refer potential guest to General Assistance. Advise potential guest to continue to call the shelter in the event a bed opens.

- **Shelter 14-**

- It is the policy of the shelter to not turn away those seeking shelter, in the case of

- a person that is not qualified for our services, staff will refer clients to an appropriate shelter.
- If the Emergency Shelter reaches capacity, staff will work closely with another Shelter to ensure all clients can secure safe shelter.
- **Shelter 15-**
  - When the shelter is full, staff provides the referral agent or youth with names and phone numbers of alternative resources for temporary shelter. We do not keep a waiting list. The person is encouraged to contact us on a regular basis to access our services in the future.
- **Shelter 16-**
  - When we are full, we assist survivors of domestic violence to find another safe place to go, or to remain safe where they are—for example, by helping them obtain a protection order. If they cannot be safe in their own home, with the survivor's permission we reach out to the other domestic violence projects throughout the state (and on rare occasions in other states) to see if there is capacity in another DV shelter. If not, we can help the individual contact general-purpose shelters statewide. Sometimes we are able to provide a night or two in a motel until a bed opens up, but this is dependent on whether or not we have private donations to pay the stay. We also are sometimes able to help with transportation, but again, this depends on the availability of financial resources and/or staff capacity.
- **Shelter 17-**
  - When our shelter is at capacity, we notify survivors/victims that we have no available bedrooms in shelter. Advocates continue to work with the survivor/victim, assisting with safety planning and offering information on other community resources including but not limited to other domestic violence resource centers, area shelters, safe-homes, motels and hotels.
- **Shelter 18-**
  - Unmet shelter needs are prioritized and handled at a supervisor/manager level of command. When capacity has been reached, persons seeking shelter meet with a supervisor manager to coordinate care. Often matters can be resolved telephonically by connecting shelter seekers with other shelters, friends, and family. When all options have been exhausted, instructions on how to navigate the night safely and warmly are provided and if warranted, the city police are notified of a person's unmet needs so safety checks can be made and police can be on the lookout for the person's wellbeing. If necessary, jackets, mittens, hats, food, water, etc., are offered or coordinated.
- **Shelter 19-**
  - The Shelter operates 8:00pm to 8:00am, 365 days a year. Minors are given priority. If the Shelter reaches capacity for the night, the shelter staff refer any additional youth, 18 or older, to the another Shelter Staff will call other shelter to inform them that a client will be coming because the our Shelter reached capacity. Whenever possible, staff accompany youth to the referred shelter. Staff always inform the 24th client upon signing in that they may be asked to leave if a minor presents in the night. Our Shelter tracks how many youth are turned away on a

nightly review, and this data is reported monthly to the Emergency Shelter Assessment Committee (ESAC).

- **Shelter 20-**
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- **Shelter 21-**
  - When the shelter is full, staff assists homeless people with referrals to other emergency shelters in the area and will assist with making connections. Potential guests might also be offered assistance with accessing food and clothing, depending on other needs.
  - Turn away Policy: Our shelters are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and guests do not
  - need to leave during the day. We do not operate a formal waitlist and upon initial inquiry, data is entered into the agency's electronic record system. If we are at capacity, or someone does not meet out eligibility requirements, staff will make referrals to other sources of support (shelters, financial assistance programs, General Assistance, faith-based organizations). People needing additional support are invited to call back to check on availability.
- **Shelter 22-**
  - When our shelter is at capacity, staff informs the caller/victim of this and continues to provide advocacy to the caller and explore alternative shelter housing possibilities, referrals, and/or resources. Sometimes it is the best or safest option for a victim fleeing domestic violence to stay in their home with an active protection order, or to go to a friend's or families home, or travel to another state. Support, safety planning, advocacy, referrals, and connection to legal services are offered throughout the call. We can also assist victims with transportation to other safe shelter or housing options as well as motels when shelter is at capacity. Additionally, our shelter offers community case management and crisis advocates who often work with these callers immediately connecting them to community resources and providing them with clothing, food pantry items, furniture, transportation for court related needs, and other crucial supports such as civil and legal advocacy. Our shelter does not maintain a wait list. Rather, when our shelter is at capacity, callers requesting shelter are offered other shelter resources and safety planning and the opportunity to call back at another time if they are still in need of shelter.
- **Shelter 23-**
  - When the shelter has reached capacity, youth aged 18 or older are referred to local adult shelter. Shelter staff contacts the other shelters to determine availability and assist in providing transportation, including outreach staff members who will transport youth and will remain connected to youth providing on-going support in accessing safe housing options. When a youth is under age 18 and all other options have been exhausted, since our shelter is the only homeless youth shelter serving minors across, the surrounding counties, we will identify an older youth to transition to one of the local shelters in order to free up a bed for the minor. We

call the shelter, explains the situation, and provides support and transportation for the youth.

- **Shelter 24-**
  - We are open to guests from 3:30PM to 8:00 AM Monday - Friday and 24 hours, Saturday and Sunday and holidays. The Shelter coordinates its hours with the local soup kitchen,
  - Hunger Prevention and drop in center, and will extend its hours during holidays or other days those facilities are closed due to severe weather. Navigation Services are provided Monday to Friday, from 9am to 5 pm. When the shelter reaches its 16 bed capacity those seeking shelter are provided referrals and information on other shelters. Callers and walk-ins are encouraged to try back on a daily basis since beds can turnover with short notice. Shelter
  - personnel work closely with local emergency services including the local police departments, General Assistance, hospitals and mental health crisis providers to ensure that, particularly during extreme weather, those on foot seeking shelter are provided with some means of getting out of the elements.
- **Shelter 25-**
  - When the shelter reaches capacity, we refer victims/survivors of domestic violence seeking shelter to other domestic violence shelters and/or general population shelters depending on safety concerns. Additionally, we work with individuals in an attempt to mitigate their homelessness by assisting with other resources and services such as safety planning, protection from abuse orders and/or financial assistance to relocate to stay with safe friends and/or family.
- **Shelter 26-**
  - Keeps a waiting list that is regularly reviewed and updated. We will also add the individual or family into coordinated entry for referral.
- **Shelter 27-**
  - We work diligently to house every individual and triage to work through most needy. In times of severe weather we will take people in and assess within 24 hours where we can place someone. If a person meets the criteria for MH or SA treatment we will work on placement in those services. We will work with landlords if someone calls with a 7 day eviction and explain tenant rights, Should someone be on the street we meet with them and work to shelter either at our shelter or another in nearby shelters by calling and working with that agency. We assist the person in calling family to see if they can stay with them until a bed opens. Emergency Shelter Supervisor consults with Clinical Director.

**Question: What is the history of the Hope House Shelter's lease with the City of Bangor?**

Staff spoke with Rindy Fogler, the Assistant Director of Bangor Public Health & Community Services who helped answer these questions in a January 22, 2020 email. In her message, Ms. Fogler explained that she spoke to Hope House Director Anne Giggey who shared the following information:

- The Hope House was essentially started by a group of volunteers in the recovery community who acquired a building on the old Dow Air Force Base.

- At the time, there was very little structure/oversight and it grew to the point where they were sheltering upwards of 100 people a night.
- The facility was taken over by Penobscot Community Health Care (PCHC), their local Federally Qualified Health Center.
- PCHC wanted to add 48 SRO transitional housing units to the building by expanding the footprint. That required going before the Bangor City Council. Based on her conversation with Ann, this was likely this the first time the Council became involved in the shelter.
  - For reasons Ann doesn't fully understand (it was before her time), the City agreed to the expansion if the total capacity of the building was capped at 114.
  - This was likely based upon the size of the structure, fire codes, and building codes (particularly around the plumbing).
- Because they wanted 48 transitional units that left them with only 66 shelter beds.
- Today, they have 54 beds and 12 overflow mats keeping them within the guidelines set by the City.

**Question: Cost of a 75 bed shelter be added to the breakdown cost along with a 200 and 150 bed shelter.**

Please see attached spreadsheet.

**Question: Percentage of revenue to OSS from GA reimbursements.**

REVENUES			
General Assistance State Reimbursements	828,550	22%	Shelter bed nights State General Assistance reimbursements
Maine State Housing Grant (ESHAP)	1,448,081	38%	Annual Maine State Housing grants
City funded	1,501,403	40%	City funded
Grand Total	3,778,034	100%	

**Question: Quote for build from two years ago.**

Please see attached conceptual project summary from 8/21/2017.