

General Assistance Program Year End Report FY 2016



**City of Portland, Maine
Health and Human Services Department
Social Services Division**

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Social Services Division
General Assistance Program
FY 2016 Year End Report**

What is General Assistance (GA)

Maine's General Assistance (GA) Program is as old as the state. Municipalities were charged with the responsibility of assisting indigent people who had no means of support and no family or friends to help them. The State's so-called "Pauper Laws" remained on the books in almost the same form from when Maine achieved statehood until the mid-1970's when legislation was enacted to change General Assistance law. In the early 1990's, the General Assistance Program was drastically changed to include "overall maximum levels of assistance," work requirements, and other program requirements. Today, the General Assistance Program serves as an emergency safety net program for Maine's low-income population.

State law requires municipalities to administer General Assistance (GA) provides immediate aid to individuals who meet eligibility requirements and are unable to provide basic necessities essential to maintain themselves or their family. Maine law states that municipalities have the responsibility to provide General Assistance to all eligible residents of the municipality and non-residents (including transients) who intend to reside in the municipality. GA provides a specific amount and type of aid for basic needs during a limited time period and is not intended to be a categorical welfare program. GA provides basic needs in the areas of shelter/housing, utilities, food, medication, and other essential goods and services. All assistance is issued in vouchers and no cash is authorized. Each applicant for GA is assigned to a Financial Eligibility Specialist who determines eligibility and refers applicants to in-house employment and self-sufficiency programs as a requirement for future eligibility.

City of Portland GA Facts

- General Assistance is a state-mandated program, which provides emergency assistance to people who are without sufficient income to meet basic needs and have liquidated all their available resources including retirement accounts, savings and life insurance policies.
- As the largest city in the state and an urban service center that offers economic opportunity, access to services and affordable housing, the City of Portland operates the largest General Assistance Program with upwards to 39% of all statewide GA expenditures.
- In FY 16, the City of Portland granted \$7.7 million in assistance to 3,486 qualifying individuals and families. 49% of those who qualified and received assistance accessed the program for six months or less.
- The City of Portland, like all municipalities, must pay all administrative and operating costs for the program, which exceeds \$565,800 annually.
- In FY 16, of the total cost of the program, \$2.3 million was paid for by Portland property tax payers and \$5.4 million was paid by the state.

**FY 16
Expenditures**

\$7.7 Million

*Accounting for
upwards to 63% of
State GA
expenditures*

- 89% of the assistance granted was used for rent, shelter bed night cost, and food. The remaining 11% of assistance is largely used for prescription medications and the purchase of personal hygiene items, utility payments, and diapers.
- We experienced a slight increase in the length of time individuals are remaining on GA and a decrease (877 people) in the number of clients served. We have seen an increase in individuals migrating to the U.S. on a B1/B2 (visitor or business) visa and planning to apply for asylum. The asylum application process takes 1-2 years and non citizens are not eligible for federal benefits including subsidized housing. Non citizens are also not able to work until they receive their work authorization permit which is issued 150 days after the asylum application is made.
- The state made changes to which non-citizens are reimbursable under GA rules. This largely affected the asylum seeking population. This led to an increase in the amount of GA costs paid for by Portland property taxes and a decrease in contributions from the state.

Who We Serve

The General Assistance Program provided direct financial assistance to 3,486 individuals, consisting of 562 families averaging 3.4 in a household, and 1,600 single adults (Attachment #1). This past year, a total of 18,540 General Assistance applications were completed (duplicate number – an individual may make more than one application during the year). This number represents a 2% increase in the number of applications for General Assistance from the previous fiscal year.

The General Assistance Program ended FY 16 with an expenditure of \$7,698,198 for direct assistance to applicants. This amount consisted of \$4,353,196 or 56.5% for rental assistance; \$1,256,192 or 16.3%, spent for shelter costs; \$1,247,536 or 16.2% for food; \$346,806 or 4.5% for medical and dental services and prescriptions; \$212,208, or 2.8% for personal hygiene items; \$116,835 or 1.5% for electric services; and \$84,500 or 1.1% for burials (see Attachments #2 and #3).

The General Assistance Program also provided assistance through shelter payments for an additional 2,700 individuals who stayed in the City-operated Oxford Street Shelter, the Community Overflow Shelter and the Family Shelter. These expenditures are the total amount of General Assistance provided to individuals, for the cost of a shelter bed in Portland. The Social Services Division works in partnership with community shelters to provide safe temporary housing. General Assistance vouchers are authorized to shelters as payment for bed nights.

The General Assistance expenditures by client characteristics chart for FY 16 provides a breakdown of dollars distributed in specific client categories (see Attachment #4).

- 53%* of assistance distributed to individuals who identified as Refugees, Asylees/Pending Asylum, or Visa Holders. In FY15 45% were identified as Refugees, Asylees/Pending Asylum, or Visa Holders.
- 17%* of assistance distributed to individuals who were considered “able-bodied” and were seeking employment. In FY 2015, 24% were considered able-bodied.
- 13%* of assistance distributed to individuals who were considered temporarily disabled due to mental health, substance abuse, or other disabilities. In FY 2015, 22% were considered temporarily disabled due to mental health, substance abuse, or other disabilities.

- 2%* of assistance distributed to individuals who were considered disabled and receiving Social Security benefits or pending receipt of benefits. In FY 2015 6% of assistance distributed to individuals who were considered disabled and receiving Social Security benefits or pending receipt of benefits.
- 1%* of assistance distributed to Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) recipients, the majority of whom received short-term emergency assistance pending receipt of housing or placement into subsidized housing. In FY 2015 3% received TANF. This number has decreased over the past few years due to the five-year limit on TANF eligibility.

**Note that many of these individuals fall into various different categories listed above, however they are only counted once. For example, someone receiving TANF may also be considered “Able-Bodied” but would only be counted in one category or the other, not both. Due to the frequent categorical duplication which we have unduplicated, the overall numbers and corresponding percentages of assistance distributed are greatly reduced.*

Accountability

Portland General Assistance utilizes the following measures designed to ensure that people who qualify can access the program and those who do not meet the requirements cannot:

- Portland developed a benefits verification system with the State Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) that compares/verifies information from a GA application with consumer information on file with DHHS.
- GA applicants are required to sign an Unemployment Compensation Verification Form. Once signed, forms are mailed to the Department of Labor Unemployment Compensation Office in Augusta to determine if any benefits are received.

Workfare Program

General Assistance law requires that able-bodied individuals participate in a municipal work program as a condition of receiving public assistance. The Workfare Program strives to offer meaningful and realistic work opportunities to General Assistance recipients. Program goals are to assist participants to become gainfully employed. Workfare participants perform assigned duties for a number of City departments. Other significant employment related activities are customized employment workshops, employment assessments, and one-on-one follow-up for job searching activities including resume development, mock interviews, and job referrals.

Workfare Statistics	FY 12	FY 13	FY 14	FY 15	FY 16
Total number of individuals performing Workfare monthly (average)	187	151	169	181	179
Total number of individuals performing Workfare (unduplicated per year)	530	486	624	493	591
Total number of hours of Workfare performed by clients	55,208	55,797	49,428	55,141	55,426

Value of work performed (calculated at minimum wage)	\$414,060	\$418,477	\$370,710	\$413,558	\$489,860
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Emergency After Hours General Assistance

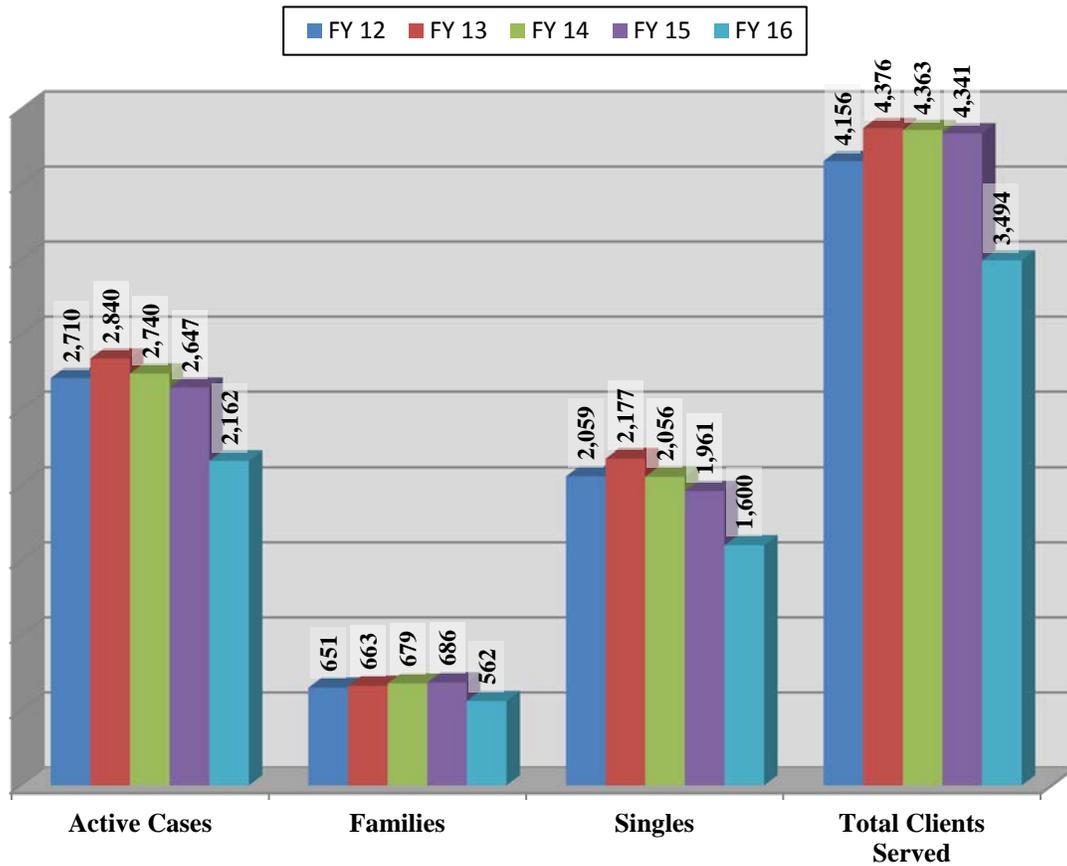
GA emergency assistance is authorized in emergency situations that occur after normal business hours (evenings and weekends). The vast majority of Emergency After Hours GA requests are for fuel assistance and shelter. The dip in numbers in FY15 is attributed to moving to individual monthly appointments. This allowed for more walk-ins to be seen during business hours which alleviated some of the need for afterhours General Assistance.

<i>Assistance Granted</i>	<i>FY 15 # in HH</i>	<i>FY 16 # in HH</i>
<i>Fuel</i>	25	6
<i>Shelter</i>	215	65
<i>Diapers/Formula</i>	7	6
<i>Food</i>	31	3
<i>Medication</i>	15	2
Total Individuals Assisted	293	83

The above depicts only those households that were assisted, this does not include those that were denied or those that inquired about information only and did not receive any assistance.

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UNDUPLICATED CASES & CLIENTS SERVED
A Five-Year Comparison

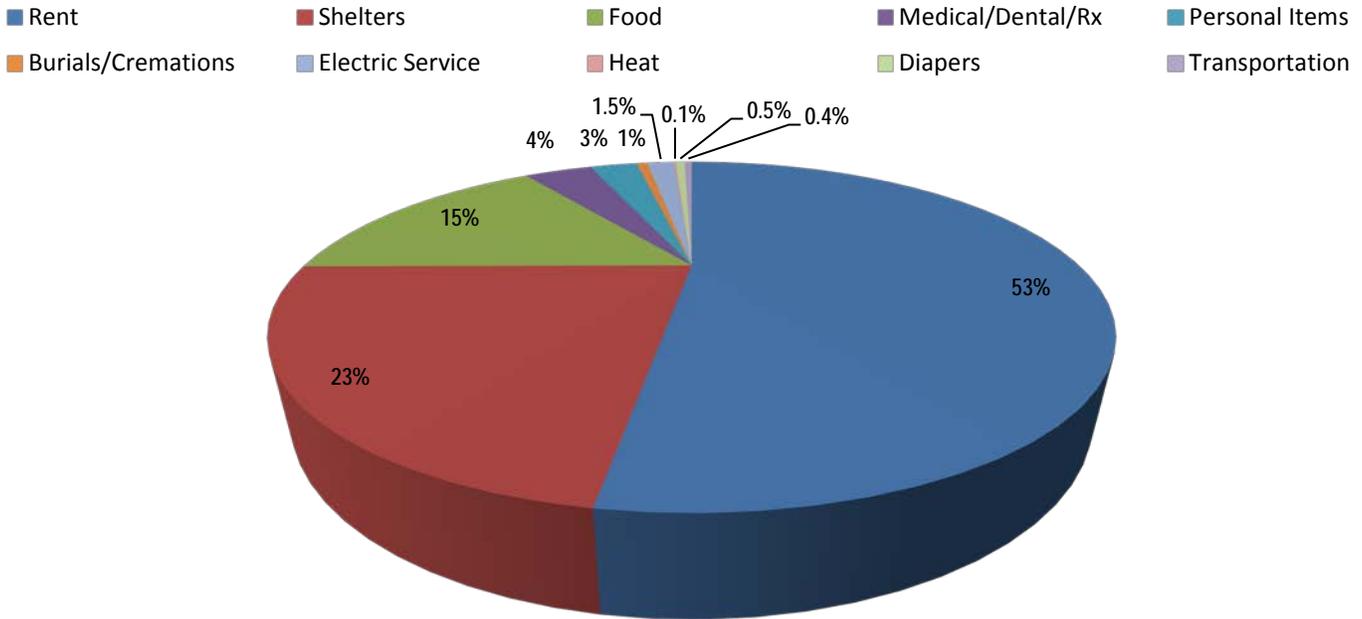


Unduplicated Numbers

	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	<u>Increase (Decrease)</u>
Number of Active Cases	2,710	2,840	2,740	2,647	2,162	(18%)
Number of Families	651	663	679	686	562	(18%)
Number of Single Adults Served	2,059	2,177	2,061	1,961	1,600	(18%)
Total Number of Clients Served	4,156	4,376	4,363	4,341	3,494	(20%)

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EXPENDITURES SUMMARY



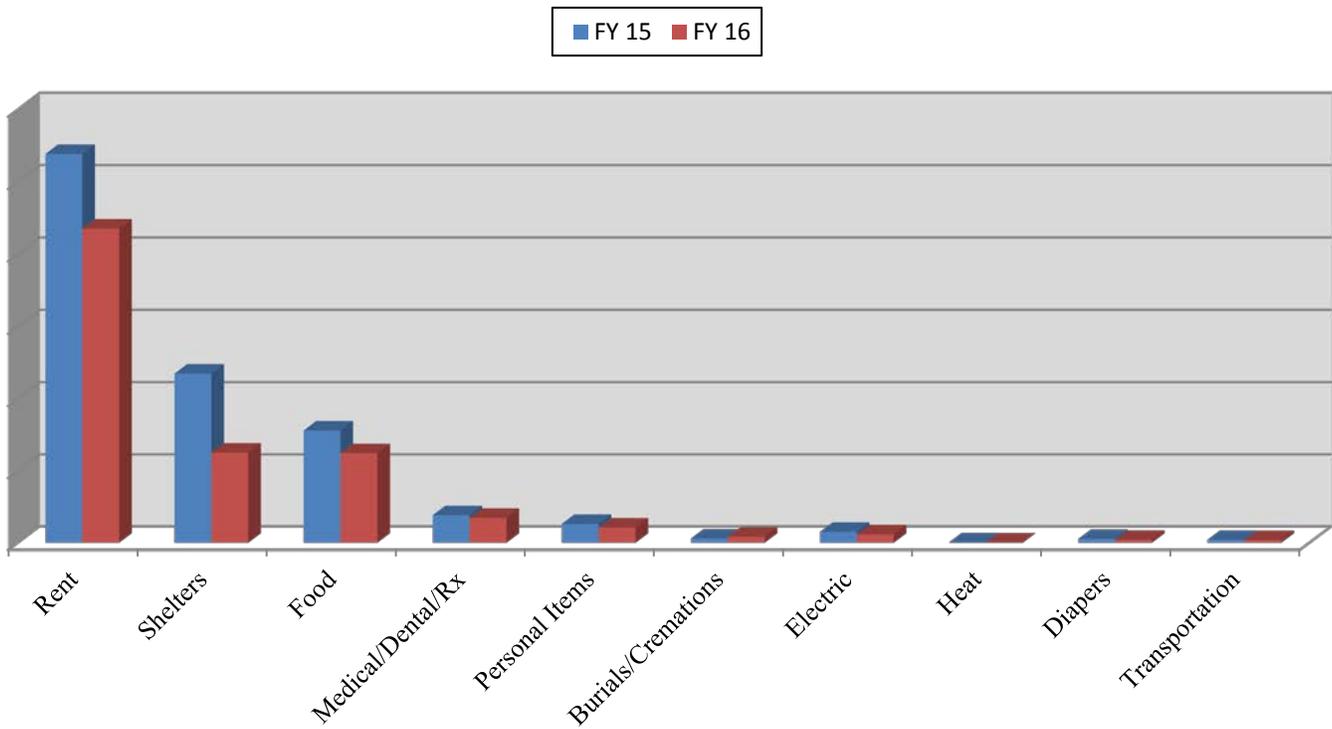
TOTAL EXPENDITURES FY 2016: \$7,698,198

	Dollars	Percent
Rent Assistance	4,353,196	56.5%
Shelters (bed night cost)	1,256,192	16.3%
Food Assistance	1,247,536	16.2%
Medical/Dental/Rx	346,806	4.5%
Personal Items (Hygiene Items)	212,208	2.8%
Electric Service	116,835	1.5%
Diapers	36,940	0.5%
Burials/Cremations	84,500	1.1%
Transportation (includes bus tickets and taxi vouchers)	39,338	0.5%
Heat/Heating Oil	4,647	0.1%

Attachment #3

FY 2016 Year End Report

TOTAL EXPENDITURES

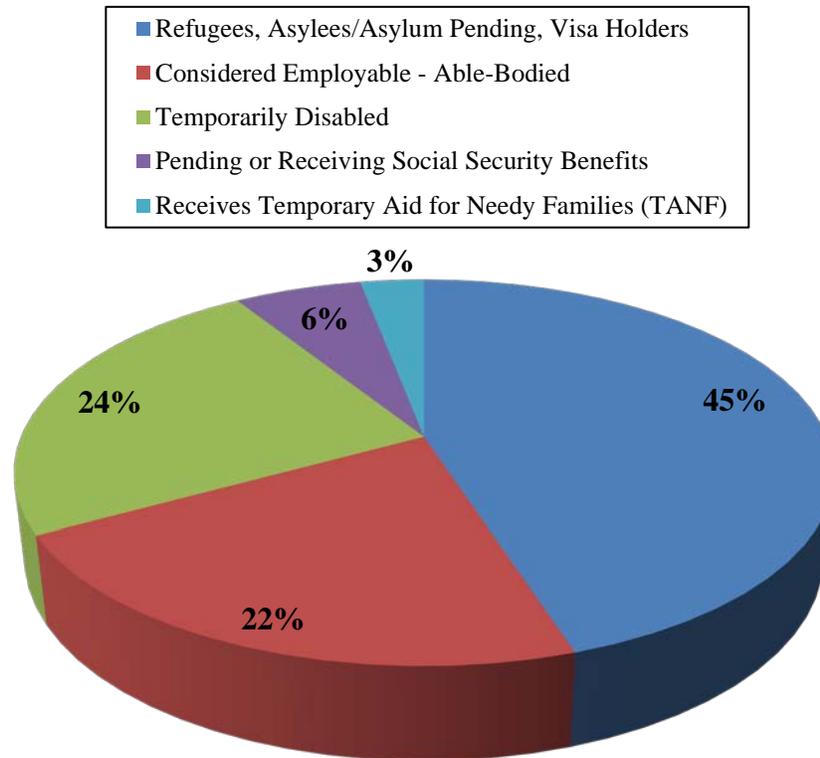


FY 15 = \$10,252,300

FY 16 = \$7,698,198

	FY 2015	FY 2016	% Change
Rent Assistance	\$5,385,852	\$4,353,196	(19%)
Shelters (bed night costs)	\$2,349,459	\$1,256,192	(46%)
Food Assistance	\$1,562,874	\$1,247,536	(20%)
Medical/Dental/Rx	\$383,948	\$346,806	(10%)
Personal Items (Hygiene Items)	\$262,539	\$212,208	(19%)
Burials/Cremations	\$58,702	\$84,500	44%
Electric Service	\$152,650	\$116,835	(23%)
Heat	\$5,238	\$4,647	(11%)
Transportation (includes bus tickets and taxi vouchers)	\$38,823	\$39,338	1%
Diapers	\$52,110	\$36,940	(29%)

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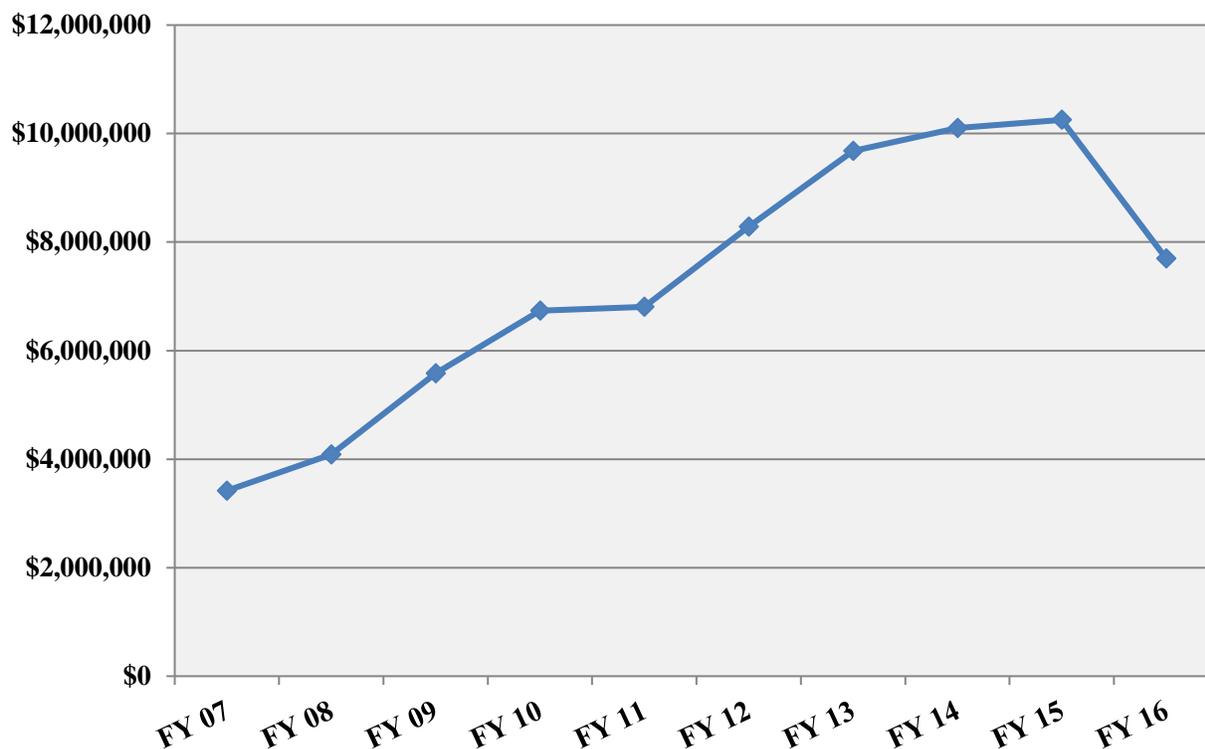


EXPENDITURES \$7,698,198

	Dollars	Percent
Refugees, Asylees/Asylum Pending, Visa Holders	4,103,448	53%
Considered Employable – Able-Bodied	1,756,192	23%
Temporarily Disabled	1,165,361	15%
Pending or Receiving Social Security Benefits	460,358	6%
Receives Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF)	212,839	3%

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**GENERAL ASSISTANCE EXPENDITURES
Fiscal Years 2007 – 2016**

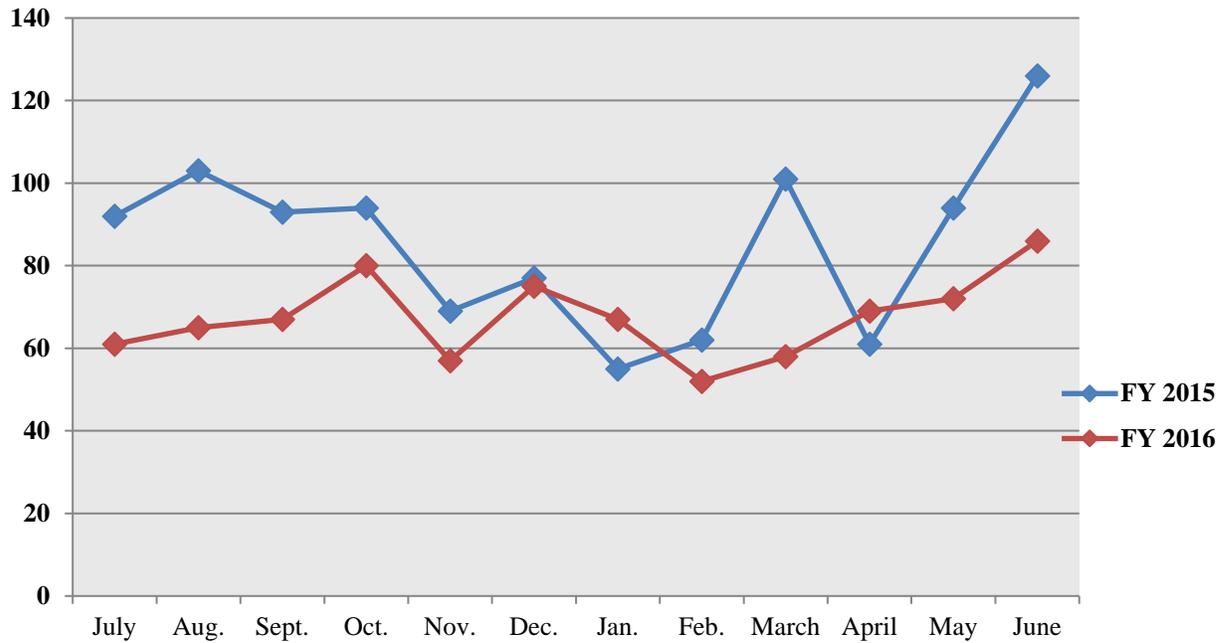


Fiscal Year	Financial Assistance	Number of Applications
2004	\$3,262,130	13,727
2005	\$2,889,938	11,880
2006	\$3,027,687	11,836
2007	\$3,419,099	13,364
2008	\$4,088,517	16,225
2009	\$5,580,648	16,754
2010	\$6,733,815	21,274
2011	\$6,809,256	23,607
2012	\$8,284,043	24,370
2013	\$9,678,567	21,352
2014	\$10,100,734	17,488
2015	\$10,252,300	18,108
2016	\$7,698,198	18,540

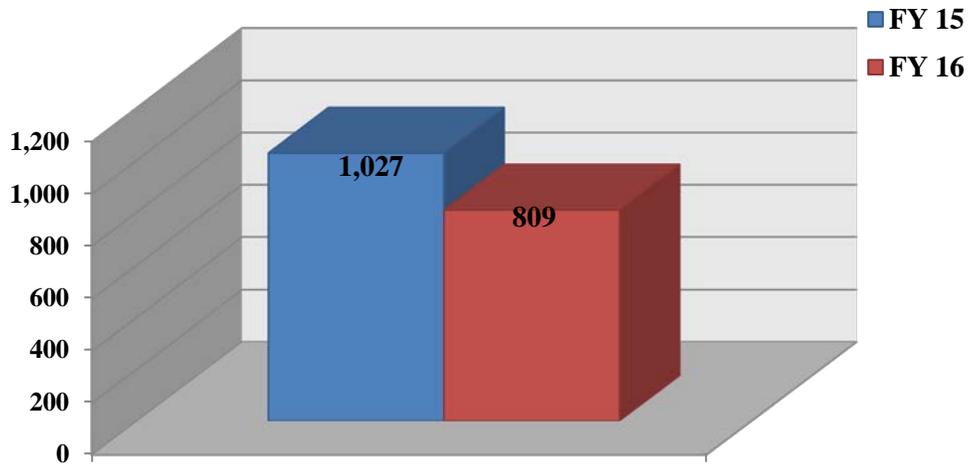
Attachment #6

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**TOTAL INTAKES
(NEW CLIENTS)**



TOTAL INTAKES/REINTAKES*

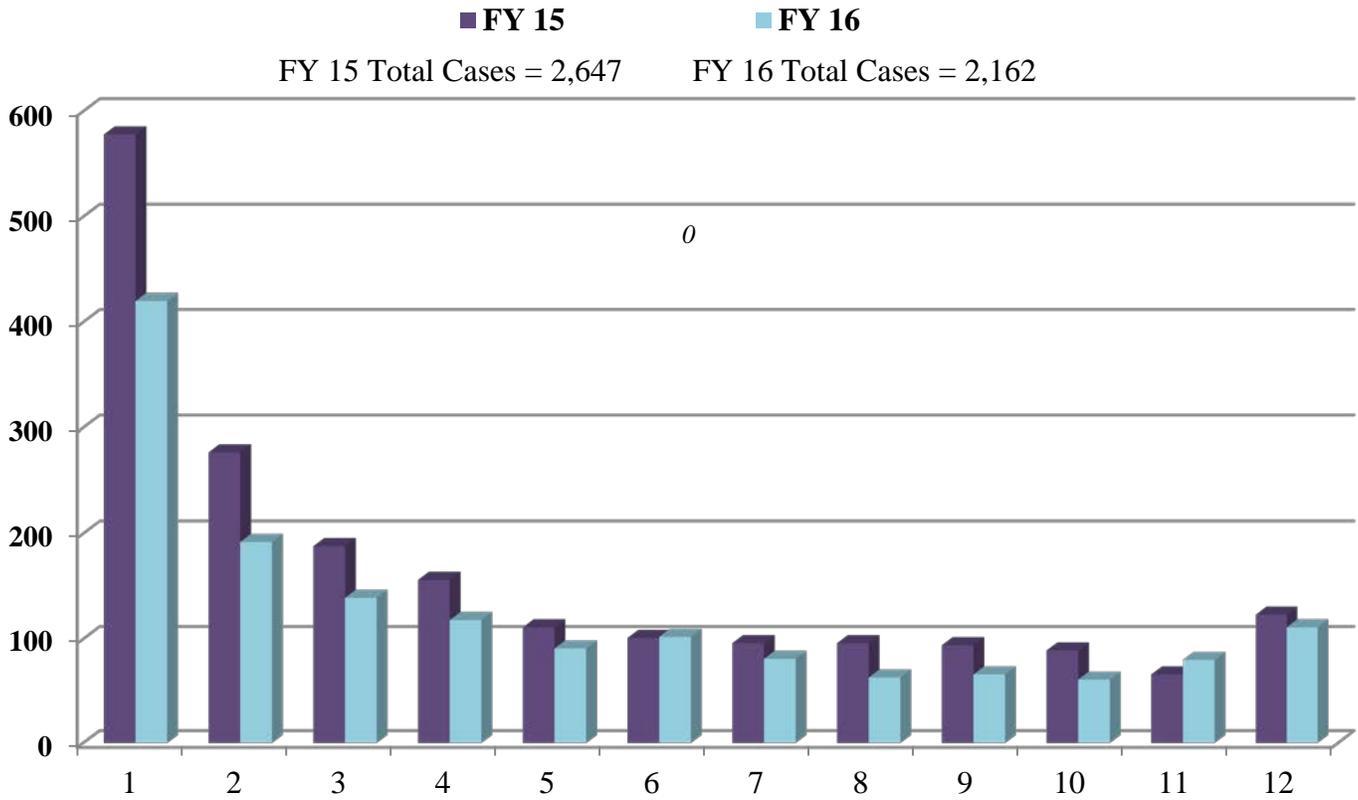


Total Intakes represents the sum of all Initial Intakes and Re-Intakes. An Initial Intake is defined as an individual, age eighteen (18) and over, who has never before utilized the City of Portland General Assistance Office.

Re-Intakes are defined as individuals who have not signed into GA for a period of twelve (12) months or longer.

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TOTAL CASES



FY 15: 1 – 3 months = 39% of all cases	4 – 6 months = 14% of all cases	7 – 9 months = 11% of all cases	10 months or longer = 36% of all cases
FY 16: 1 – 3 months = 35% of all cases	4 – 6 months = 14% of all cases	7 – 9 months = 10% of all cases	10 months or longer = 41% of all cases

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WORKFARE

