

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

*General Assistance Program*  
*Year End Report*  
*FY 2011*

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**Health & Human Services Department**  
**Social Services Division**  
**General Assistance Program**  
**FY 2011 Year End Report**

## **General Assistance**

### **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. That primary responsibility continued until the federal government stepped in with the great depression of the 1930's and the war on Poverty Programs in the 1960's. 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. The Legislature required municipalities to develop policies and procedures and to adopt ordinances based on State law. In the early 1990's, the General Assistance Program was drastically changed to include "overall maximum levels of assistance," work requirements, limits on emergency assistance, and other program requirements. These changes were passed by the legislature as part of the Governor's budget balancing bill. 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 (G.A.), which provides immediate aid to individuals who meet eligibility requirements and are unable to provide basic necessities essential to maintain themselves or their family. G.A. 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. G.A. 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 G.A. 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.*

*Maine State law requires that each municipality administer General Assistance and that the program adheres to state policies and procedures. 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. Maine law also established a maximum eligibility amount, which varies depending on county and household size.*

### **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 40% of all statewide expenditures.*

- *In FY 11, the City of Portland granted \$6.8 million in assistance to 4,041 qualifying individuals and families. 77% 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 \$600,000 annually.*
- *In FY 11, of the total cost of the program, \$2.3 million was paid for by Portland property tax payers and \$4.9 million was paid by the state.*
- *93% of the assistance granted was used for food and shelter with approximately 52% of the rent assistance granted for three months or less. The remaining 7% of assistance is largely used for heat, utilities, prescription medications and the purchase of diapers.*
- *With high unemployment rates, the city is witnessing an ever increasing number of able-bodied, unemployed adults seeking assistance; 35% of recipients are able-bodied and actively looking for employment, and since the recession, workfare participation has increased nearly 300% in recent years. The City of Portland **requires** all able-bodied applicants to participate in workfare in order to receive assistance.*

## **MAINE GENERAL ASSISTANCE EXPENSES**

### ***Changes in General Assistance due to the Economic Downturn ...***

*This year we have experienced an increase in the number of General Assistance applications. We have also experienced a slight increase in first time applicants (intakes) and former General Assistance recipients reapplying for assistance due to our weak economy. Some of these first time applicants own their own homes, have previously been employed and are now struggling with increased fuel costs, and general household expenses. Even with extended Unemployment Compensation benefits, many consumers are not able to meet their basic needs and are finding themselves dependent on the General Assistance program for their basic needs.*

<b>General Assistance Expenditures</b> <i>(Total cost of GA for all Municipalities in Maine)</i>	<b>State Reimbursements</b>	<b>City Cost</b>
2003	\$7,772,592	\$4,939,605
2004	\$8,883,602	\$5,654,506
2005	\$8,811,026	\$5,520,958
2006	\$9,378,320	\$4,701,255
2007	\$9,909,732	\$6,124,399
2008	\$11,570,460	\$7,230,608
2009	\$13,942,772	\$8,832,771
2010	\$15,892,018	\$10,447,784
2011	\$16,868,840	\$10,648,758

### ***City of Portland***

#### ***Total GA Financial Assistance Expended***

2010	\$6,733,815
<b>2011</b>	<b>\$6,809,256</b>

#### ***State Reimbursement***

2010	\$5,071,007	75%
<b>2011</b>	<b>\$4,978,115</b>	<b>73%</b>

## **Who We Serve...**

*The General Assistance Program provided direct financial assistance to 4,041 individuals, consisting of 632 families and 2,055 single adults (attachment #1). This past year, a total of 23,607 General Assistance applications were completed (duplicate number – an individual may make more than one application during the year). This number represents a 11% increase in the number of applications for General Assistance.*

*The General Assistance Program ended FY 11 with an expenditure of \$6,809,256 for direct assistance to applicants. This amount consisted of \$4,157,934 or 61% for rental assistance (including \$1,570 for security deposits); \$1,807,214 or 26%, spent for shelter costs; \$378,139 or 6%, for food; \$122,606 or 2% for medications/dental services and prescriptions; \$94,765, or 1% for personal hygiene items; \$98,411 or 2% for electric services; \$85,868 or 1% for burials; \$23,286 or 0.4% for heating costs (including gas); \$18,066 or 0.3% for diapers; and \$22,966 or 0.3% for other expenses (including wearing apparel and transportation costs) (see Attachment #2 and 3).*

*The General Assistance Program also provided assistance through shelter payments for an additional 2,578 individuals who stayed in the City-operated Oxford Street 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 11 provides a breakdown of dollars distributed in specific client categories (see Attachment #4).*

- *18% of assistance distributed to individuals who were considered temporarily disabled due to mental health, substance abuse, or other disabilities. In FY 2010, 22% were considered disabled.*
- *16% of assistance distributed to individuals who were considered disabled and receiving Social Security benefits or pending receipt of benefits. In FY 2010, 20.5% were receiving or pending receipt of Social Security.*
- *35% of assistance distributed to individuals who were considered “able-bodied” and were seeking employment. In FY 2010 37% were considered able-bodied.*
- *10% 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 2010 13% received TANF.*
- *21% of assistance distributed to Refugees, immigrants, and individuals pending asylum status.*

## **Accountability**

Portland was the **first** municipality in the state to administer General Assistance with the following measures designed to ensure that people who qualify can access the program and those who do not, cannot:

- All longer term (6 months – 1 year) GA recipients are referred to in-house SSI disability determination specialist for assistance in applying for SSI/DI benefits.
- 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.
- All applicants who apply for GA are required to sign Bank Information Release forms which are mailed to area banking institutions for verification of available resources.
- 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.
- The City of Portland utilizes Work Number, a third party work verification company used by over 2,000 employers to discover any unreported employment.

## **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.

<b>Workfare Statistics</b>	<b>FY 07</b>	<b>FY 08</b>	<b>FY 09</b>	<b>FY 10</b>	<b>FY 11</b>
Total number of individuals performing Workfare monthly (average)	35	34	85	112	181
Total number of individuals performing Workfare (unduplicated per year)	218	224	439	557	625
Total number of hours of Workfare performed by clients	13,307	17,535	43,749	45,573	60,494
Value of work performed (calculated at minimum wage)	\$89,271	\$121,832	\$319,898	\$334,878	\$453,705

## **Refugees**

It is our experience that when secondary migrant refugees, or New Mainers, arrive in Portland, their first stop is the General Assistance office. New Mainers are provided assistance with shelter, location of permanent housing, and other basic needs. The majority of New Mainers acclimate very quickly into their new community. One of their first goals is to locate employment. Statistics for FY 2011 indicate that 18% of General Assistance recipients were refugees or immigrants. Last year, 19% of all General Assistance recipients were refugees or immigrants. This information is for

secondary migrant refugees and those seeking/pending asylum only (it does not include those here on B1/B2 Visas, which has increased dramatically over the past fiscal year).

**TOTAL NUMBER OF REFUGEES RECEIVING GENERAL ASSISTANCE**

<i>Refugee Status</i>	<i>FY 07</i>	<i>FY 08</i>	<i>FY 09</i>	<i>FY 10</i>	<i>FY 11</i>
<i>Secondary Migrant Refugees &amp; Pending Asylum</i>	687	726	1019	841	714

The Division’s Refugee Services Program provides cultural skills training, employment assessments and job placement, life skills training and case management services for secondary migrant refugees in Portland. General Assistance serves a vital role for New Mainers migrating to Portland.

The General Assistance Program is considered the “final safety net” for Portland’s most vulnerable residents, low-income individuals, and Portland’s homeless population. The Division offers a variety of programs, which are designed to assist in the transition from public assistance to self-sufficiency.

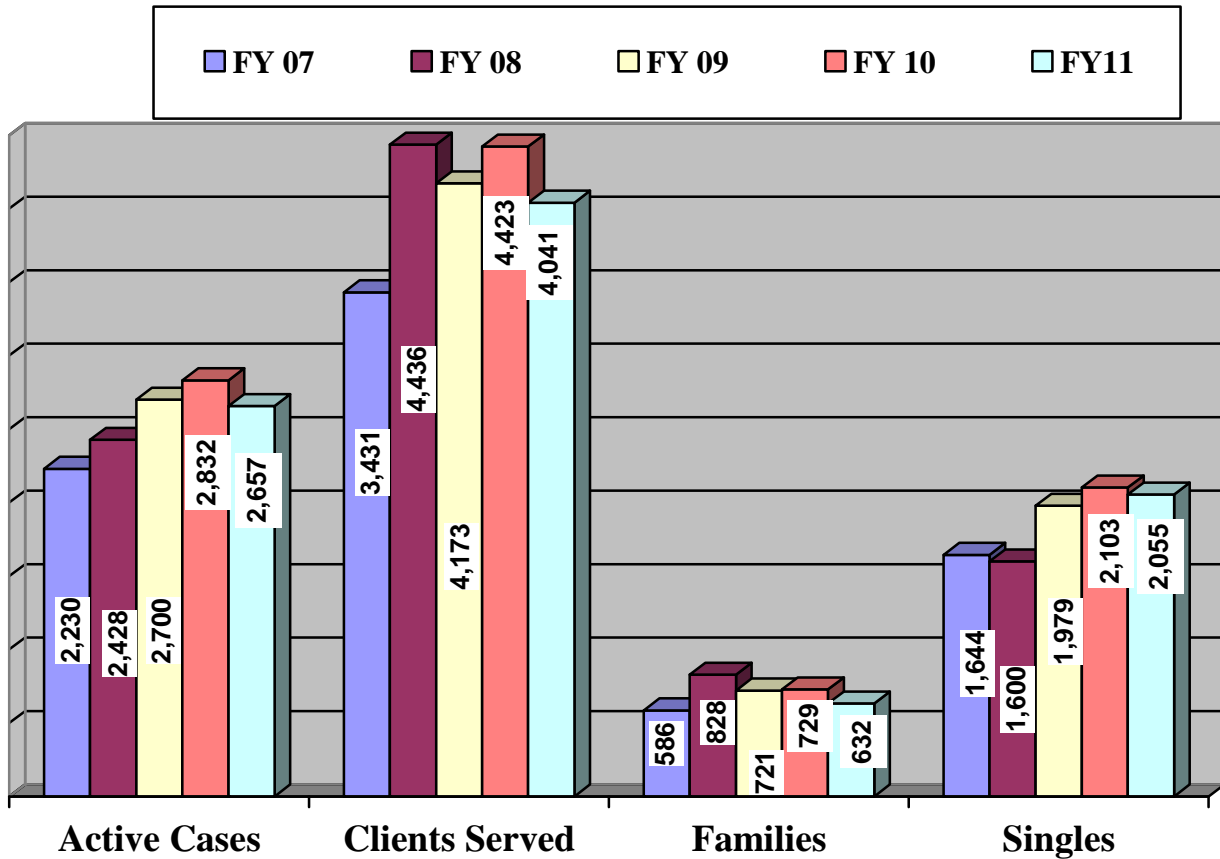
**Emergency After Hours General Assistance**

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.

<b><i>Assistance Granted</i></b>	<b><i>FY 10 # in HH</i></b>	<b><i>FY 11 # in HH</i></b>
<i>Fuel</i>	128	180
<i>Shelter</i>	237	157
<i>Diapers/Formula</i>	23	34
<i>General/Other</i>	1	14
<i>Food</i>	15	3
<i>Medication</i>	7	1
<b><i>Total Households Assisted</i></b>	<b>411</b>	<b>389</b>

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.

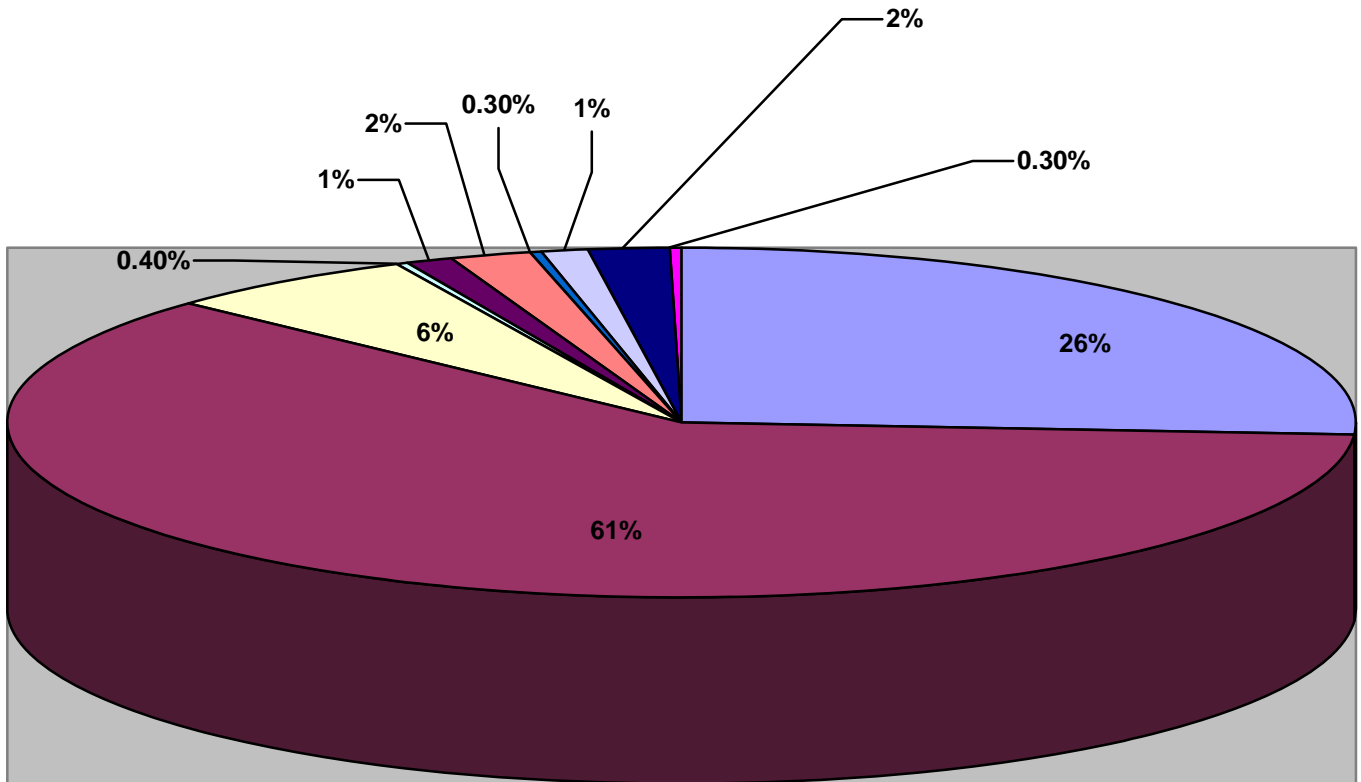
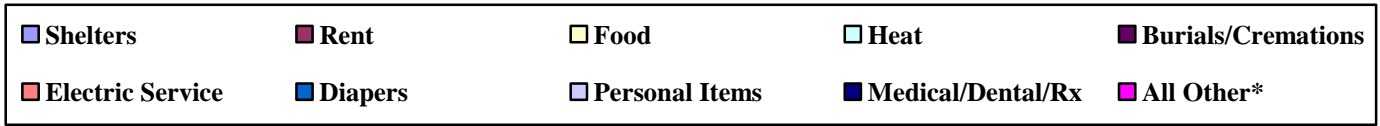
**GENERAL ASSISTANCE  
UNDUPLICATED CASES & CLIENTS SERVED  
A Five-Year Comparison**



**Unduplicated Numbers**

	FY 07	FY 08	FY09	FY 10	FY11	<u>Decrease</u>
Number of Active Cases	2,230	2,444	2,700	2,832	2,657	-6%
Number of Families	4586	653	721	729	632	-13%
Number of Single Adults Served	1,644	1,791	1,979	2,103	2,055	-2%
<b>Total Number of Clients Served</b>	<b>3,431</b>	<b>3,745</b>	<b>4,173</b>	<b>4,423</b>	<b>4,041</b>	<b>-9%</b>

## FY 2011 GENERAL ASSISTANCE EXPENDITURES SUMMARY

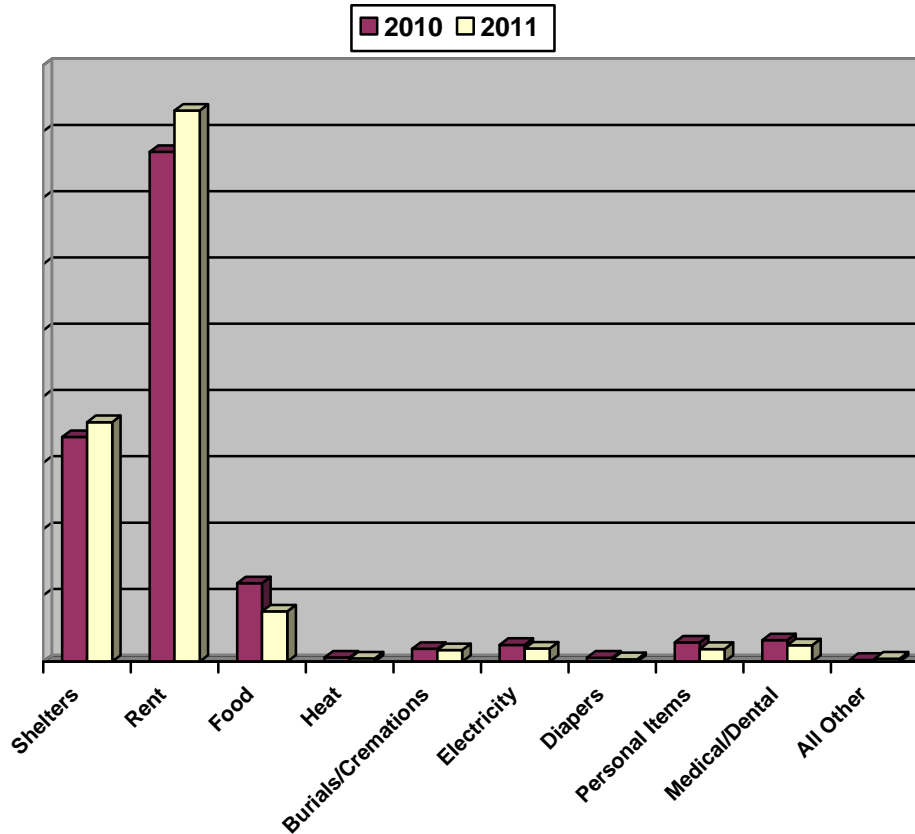


**TOTAL EXPENDITURES FY 2011 \$6,809,256**

	Dollars	Percent
Rent Assistance	\$4,157,934	61%
Shelters (Reimbursement to shelters)	\$1,807,214	26%
Food Assistance	\$378,139	6%
Medical/Dental/Rx	\$122,606	2%
Personal Items (Hygiene Items)	\$94,765	1%
Electric Service	\$98,411	2%
Burials/Cremations	\$85,868	1%
Heat	\$23,286	0.4%
Diapers	\$18,066	0.3%
All Other*	\$22,966	0.3%

\* Other includes transportation

## TOTAL EXPENDITURES



## TOTAL GENERAL ASSISTANCE EXPENDITURES

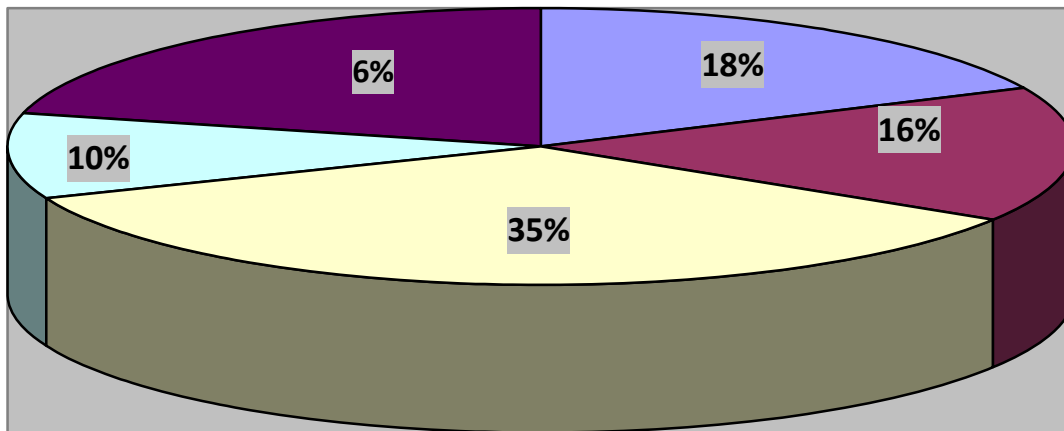
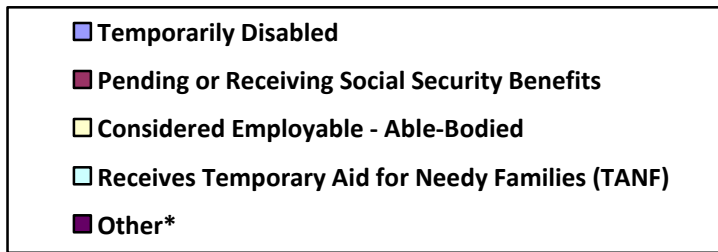
2010 = \$6,733,815

2011 = \$6,809,256

	FY 2010	FY 20101	% Change
Rent Assistance	\$3,845,385	\$4,157,934	8%
Shelters (Reimbursement to shelters)	\$1,695,655	\$1,807,214	7%
Food Assistance	\$592,121	\$378,139	-36%
Medical/Dental/Rx	\$160,741	\$122,606	-24%
Personal Items (Hygiene Items)	\$143,881	\$94,765	-34%
Electric Service	\$126,362	\$98,411	-22%
Burials/Cremations	\$95,891	\$85,868	-10%
Heat	\$30,384	\$23,286	-23%
Diapers	\$29,672	\$18,066	-39%
All Other*	\$13,266	\$22,966	73%

\*Other includes transportation

### FY 2011 GENERAL ASSISTANCE



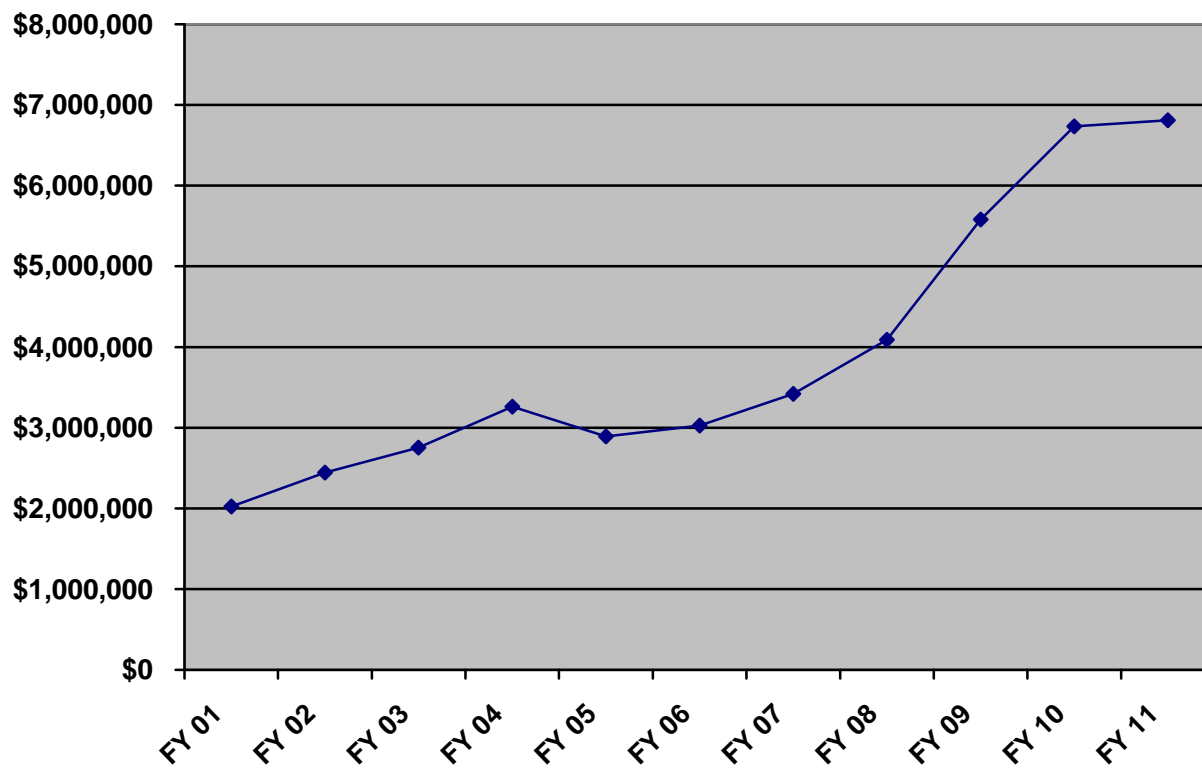
### EXPENDITURES \$6,809,256

	Dollars	Percent
Temporarily Disabled	\$1,246,094	18%
Pending or Receiving Social Security Benefits	\$1,069,053	16%
Considered Employable – Able-Bodied	\$2,383,239	35%
Receives Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF)	\$680,926	10%
Other*	\$1,429,944	21%

*\*Other includes: Refugees, immigrants and individuals pending asylum.*

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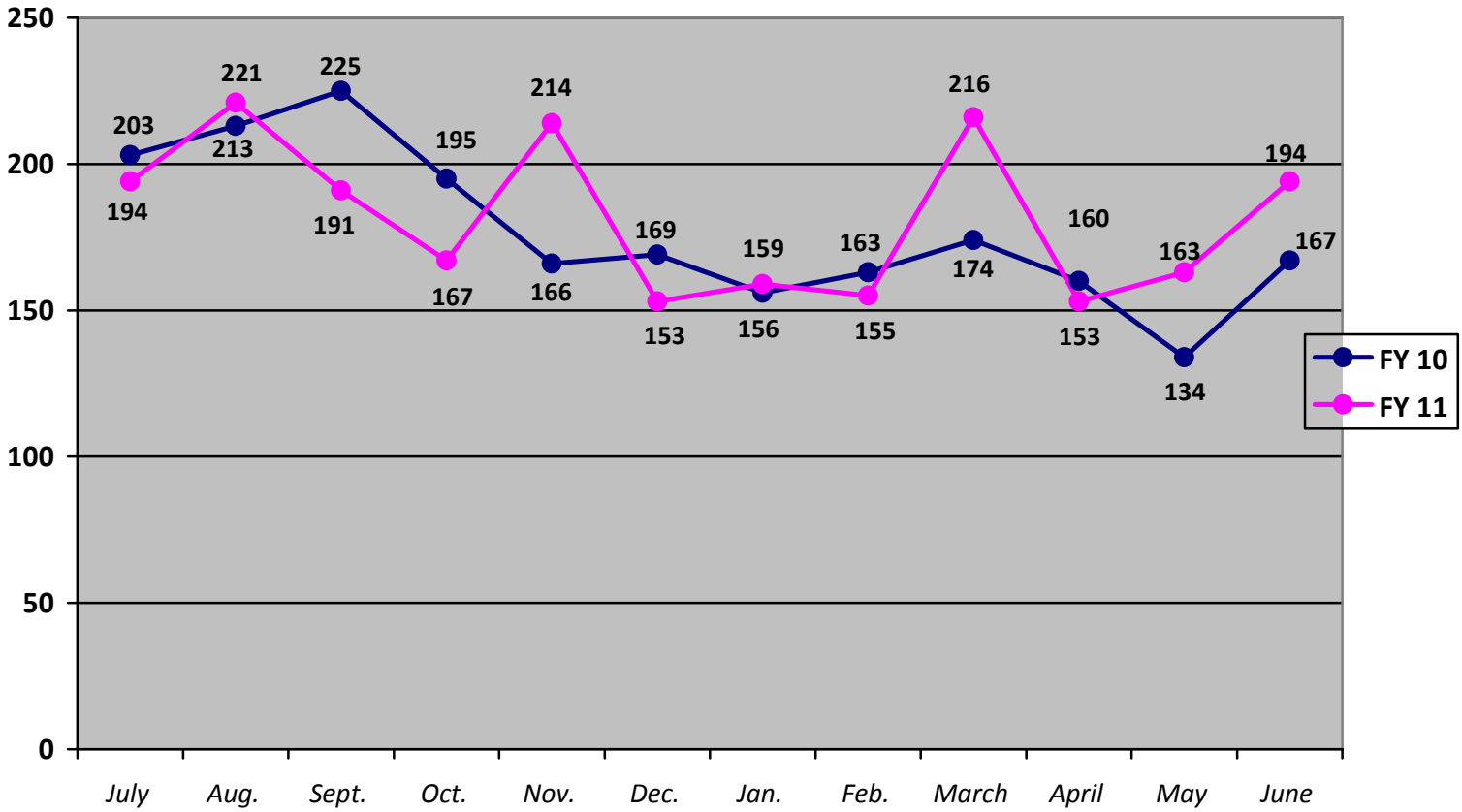
**GENERAL ASSISTANCE EXPENDITURES**  
**Fiscal Years 2001 – 2011**



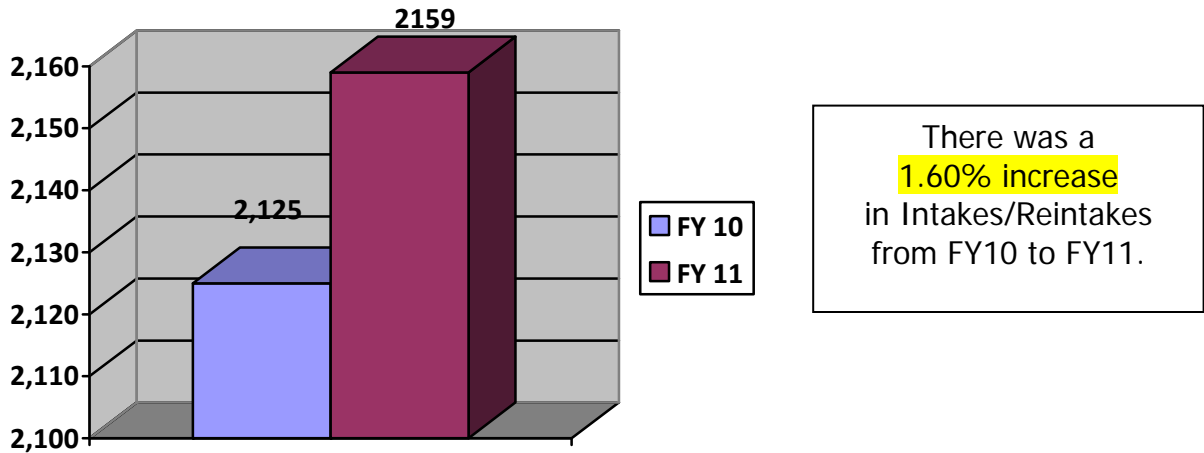
<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Financial Assistance</b>	<b>Number of Applications</b>
2000-01	\$2,021,604	11,000
2001-02	\$2,443,067	11,427
2002-03	\$2,751,993	12,054
2003-04	\$3,262,130	13,727
2004-05	\$2,889,938	11,880
2005-06	\$3,027,687	11,836
2006-07	\$3,419,099	13,364
2007-08	\$4,088,517	16,225
2008-09	\$5,580,648	16,754
2009-10	\$6,733,815	21,274
2010-11	\$6,809,256	23,607

**GENERAL ASSISTANCE TOTAL INTAKES**

*Monthly Data for FY 2011 compared with FY 2010*



**GENERAL ASSISTANCE TOTAL INTAKES\***  
*FY 11 Compared with FY 10*



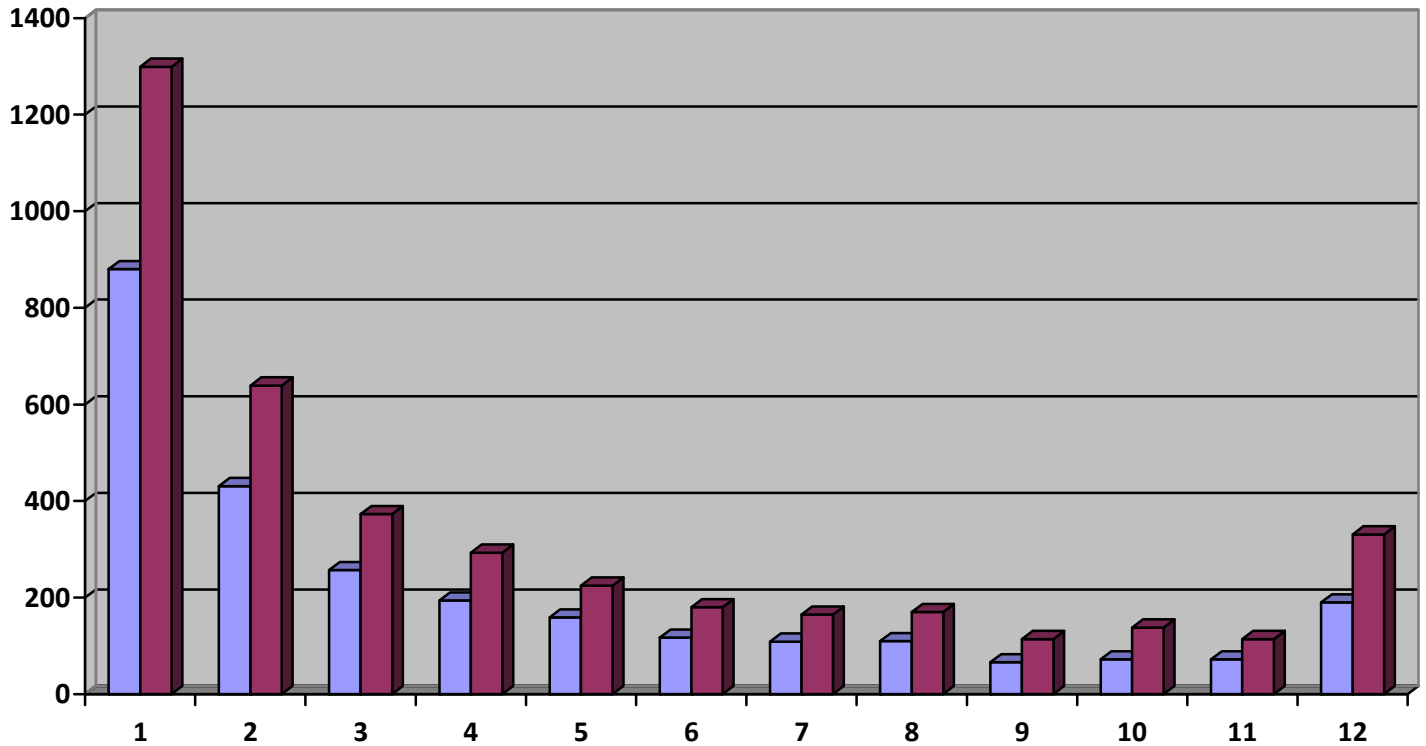
\* "Total Intakes" represents the sum of all Initial Intakes and Re-Intakes. An Initial Intake is defined as an individual, age eighteen (18) and over, who has never before utilized the City of Portland General Assistance office. A Re-Intake is defined as an individual who has not signed into GA for a period of twelve (12) months or longer.

### GENERAL ASSISTANCE

### LENGTH OF ASSISTANCE FY 2011

■ Cases ■ People

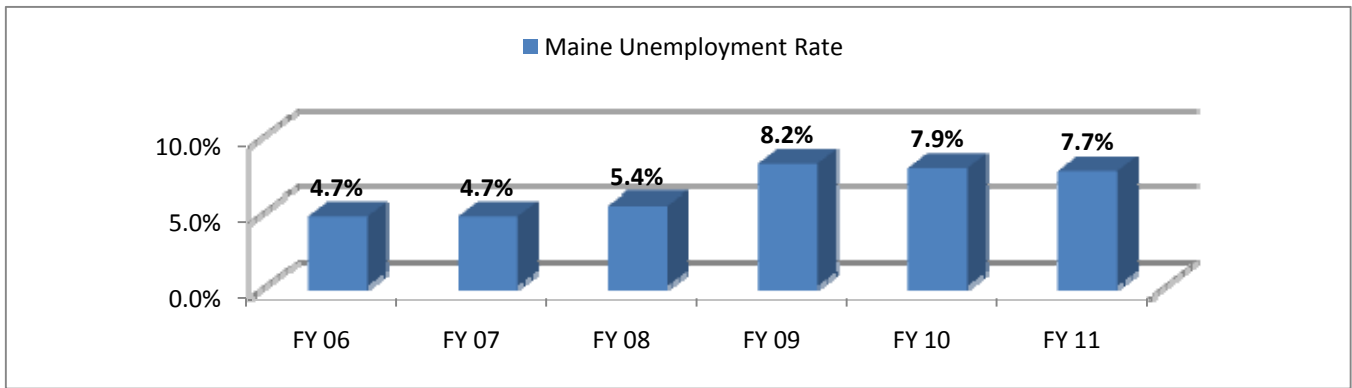
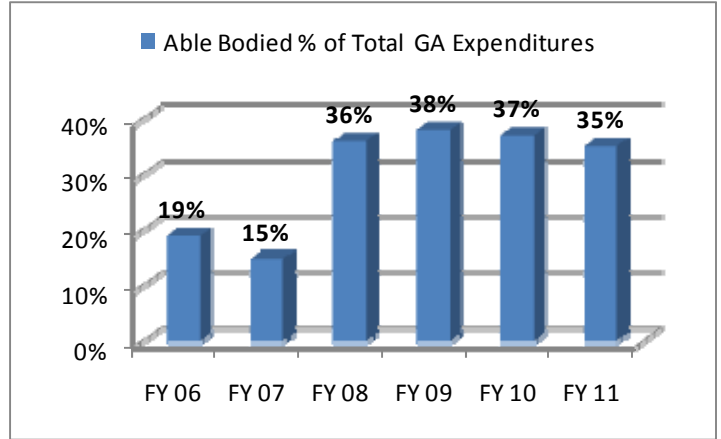
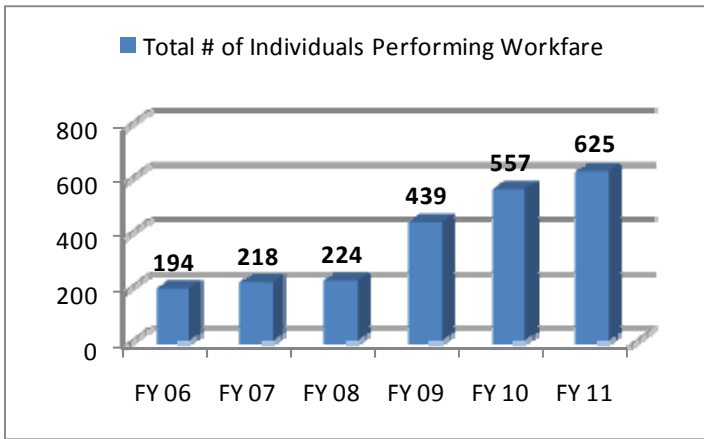
Total Cases = 2657 Total People = 4041



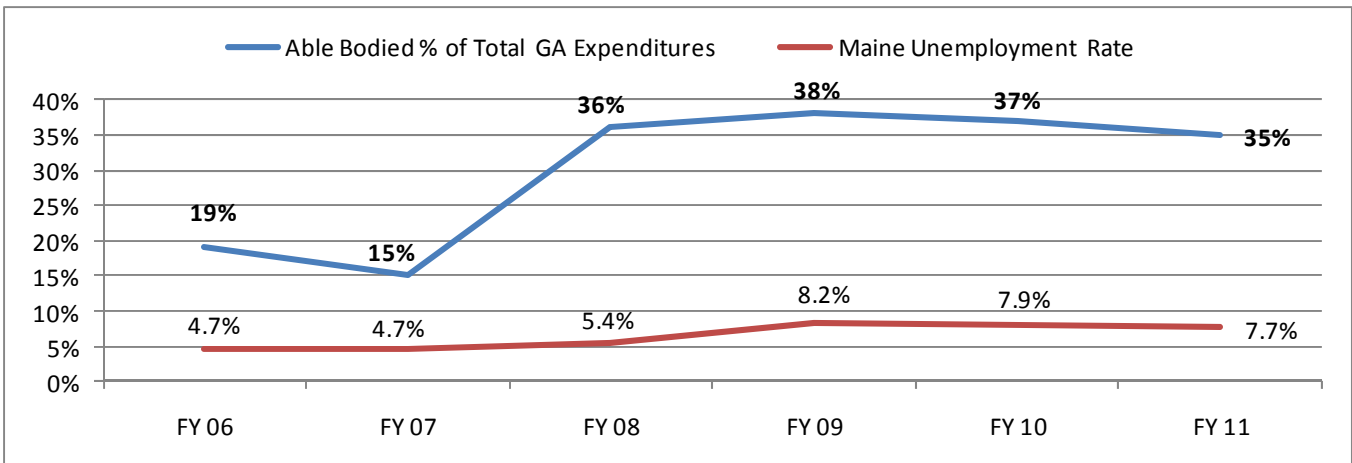
1-3 months = 59% of all cases      4-6 months = 18% of all cases      7-9 months = 11% of all cases      10-12 months = 12% of all cases

**GENERAL ASSISTANCE**

**WORKFARE FY 2011**



*\*FY 11 Maine Unemployment Rate has been approximated based on available information*



*\*FY 11 Maine Unemployment Rate has been approximated based on available information*