

City of Portland

Kate Snyder, *Mayor*

Danielle P. West, *City Manager*

June 29, 2023



The Honorable Janet T. Mills
Governor
State of Maine
210 State Street
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Governor Mills,

Thank you for your response to our letter dated June 2, 2023. We are appreciative of the State's support for all who seek assistance through the State's General Assistance program.

We write again today to share additional and updated information, and ask for your help. Specifically, we ask for your support of the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) proposal to use Unity College dorms and campus amenities to provide transitional housing for Asylum Seekers.

On August 16th, the Portland Exposition building will stop being used as a temporary overflow emergency shelter site.

As you know, the City struggled to provide warmth and overnight shelter to people in need this past winter during some brutally cold stretches. In response to a need for emergency shelter that far outpaced the availability of Portland's municipal shelter beds (Homeless Services Center, 208 beds; Family Shelter, 146 beds), hotel availability, and any other housing options, we:

- used overflow space at our Family Shelter (December 2022);
- expanded temporary overnight shelter to a middle school gymnasium (January 2023); and
- opened the Portland Expo building as a temporary emergency shelter for 300 people in family units (April 2023).

As of June 5th, we stopped enrollments at the Expo, in order to focus on our plan of finding transitional housing, permanent housing, and/or host homes through Project Home, for those being sheltered. However, due to a general lack of housing supply, it is unlikely that every family sheltered at the Expo will be successfully transitioned to a housing placement by the time it is decommissioned as an emergency shelter. And so, we ask for your help in order to address any families who have not been housed on/after August 16th.

We believe the GPCOG Unity College proposal offers near-immediate transitional housing for asylum seekers already here in Maine, and we ask for your support.

While this would be a complex undertaking that would require, among other things, local community buy-in, involvement and support, we welcome the opportunity to work with you, your staff, GPCOG, and local, regional and community partners to support the use of this site to provide transitional supported housing to Asylum Seekers already in Maine including, but not limited to, the families currently housed at the Expo.

If Unity College cannot be used, we ask you to call up the National Guard to stand up and operate an emergency shelter for asylum seekers.

We acknowledge that this is an emergency tool that any governor would be cautious to employ. That said, as we continue our work with the City's encampment crisis response team to address the people we have currently sleeping outdoors, we believe that the unprecedented need facing both asylum seekers and the circumstantially unhoused, coupled with the lack of shelter options, municipal or nonprofit operators, and the likely expiration of the emergency rental assistance (ERA) program constitutes a crisis that requires the prompt use of this emergency tool.

Governor Mills, thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of our requests. We welcome the opportunity to talk with you further about the issues, our request for help, and any other options for response we may be able to pursue together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kate Snyder".

Kate Snyder, Mayor

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Danielle P. West".

Danielle West, City Manager