

## **Frequently Asked Questions:**

### **What is General Assistance?**

General Assistance is a program available in each municipality in Maine to help eligible people who do not have enough money to cover basic needs; such as, housing, food, heating fuel, and other goods or services essential to maintain themselves or their families.

### **Where does the money come from?**

The program is funded by local property taxes with 70% reimbursement from the State of Maine DHHS Department.

### **How do I apply?**

You can apply at the Caribou Municipal Building located at 25 High Street in Caribou. The General Assistance office is available to take applications, Tuesday and Thursday, by appointment only. Appointments can be made by calling (207)493-3324 Ext. 221. Appointments will be rescheduled if you arrive more than ten minutes late.

### **What if I have an emergency and Caribou Municipal Building is closed?**

In a life or health threatening emergency after hours, you may contact the Caribou Police Department at (207)493-3301 and leave your name and phone number where you can be reached and a representative will call you.

### **Do I have to be a Caribou resident?**

For the purposes of this program a “resident” means a person who is physically present in Caribou with the intention of remaining in Caribou to maintain or establish a home and who has no other residence.

### **How long does it take to apply?**

Your first visit will require an interview during which a written application will be completed and will take approximately an hour.

### **What information will I need when I apply?**

Your General Assistance budget will be based on the 30-day period following your application. We will also look back to 30 days before you applied, to see what money you received, and how you spent it. Applicants must provide proof of identification for themselves and all household members. You will be asked for your household income, expenses and the number of people in your household. You will be asked to show the GA Administrator proof of your income and your expenses including food, housing costs, heating fuel, electricity, water, sewer, medical expense, work related expenses, etc. You will be asked to provide verification from a doctor if you are ill, disabled, or unable to work. You will be asked to provide social security numbers, birth dates, and driver’s licenses (or Maine State ID).

Clients need to access their DHHS Program Benefit information and bring it in when applying for General Assistance. In order to make a General Assistance determination, this office needs the information from

the DHHS Summary page to verify that you have sought out all DHHS assistance programs as a resource. Search for the website called “My Maine Connection” or type in the link: <https://www1.maine.gov/benefits/account/login/html>. If you do not have access to the internet then we will access your benefit information as part of the application process.

### **Who will know that I applied for General Assistance?**

Your application and any case records pertaining to it are strictly confidential by law. You (the applicant), your attorney, and certain government personnel may review your records. The general public cannot review your records unless you have given your expressed written permission.

### **When will I get help?**

You will be issued a written decision as to your eligibility within 24 hours after you apply. Please be aware that if you have not furnished sufficient information, including verification required, to enable us to determine eligibility, we must consider your application incomplete and find you ineligible for any assistance until you reapply with adequate information.

### **If I am eligible will I get a check?**

All assistance is issued in the form of vouchers payable to vendors who have provided your household with goods or services.

### **How much assistance can I get?**

The General Assistance Program is regulated by State Law, which has set an overall maximum amount of assistance that a household can receive. In addition Caribou’s GA guidelines contain maximum amounts of assistance allowable for each category of assistance including, rent, food, electricity, etc. We cannot exceed those established maximums even though household’s expense for various items may exceed those amounts. To be eligible, your income must fall below the overall maximum level of assistance for a household your size and your income must also be less than the amount you need to pay for basic necessities using Caribou’s guidelines.

### **How long can I continue to get help?**

At the time an applicant receives a decision on their application, the administrator will inform them of their responsibilities for being eligible in the future. The period covered by an application and any assistance given under that application cannot exceed 30 days. However, there is no limitation on how many times a person can reapply and continue to be found eligible for assistance. The General Assistance program budgets your needs for 30 days forward from the date of application. Upon a repeat application for General Assistance, the client must provide documentation (receipts) of all their spending over the past thirty days. The amount of income from all sources received by the household must be provided. The Applicant must show that they have utilized all potential resources the administrator referred them to on their prior decision.

### **What would cause me to be ineligible or disqualified from the General Assistance Program?**

General Assistance is a program that encourages clients to do all they can to prevent needing future assistance. An applicant may be found ineligible to receive general assistance if they: misspend their money on items that are not considered basic necessities (this will count as money available to the household and will affect the amount of eligibility); if a client forfeits a benefit, this benefit will not be replaced; if a client quits or is fired from a job, they are disqualified for a 120 day period; for failing to perform or complete a workfare assignment; for willfully making a false representation about their eligibility; for not providing or permitting the administrator to gather necessary verification and documentation as required; as well as others.