

# Office for Family Independence

Anthony Pelotte, Director

January 2021

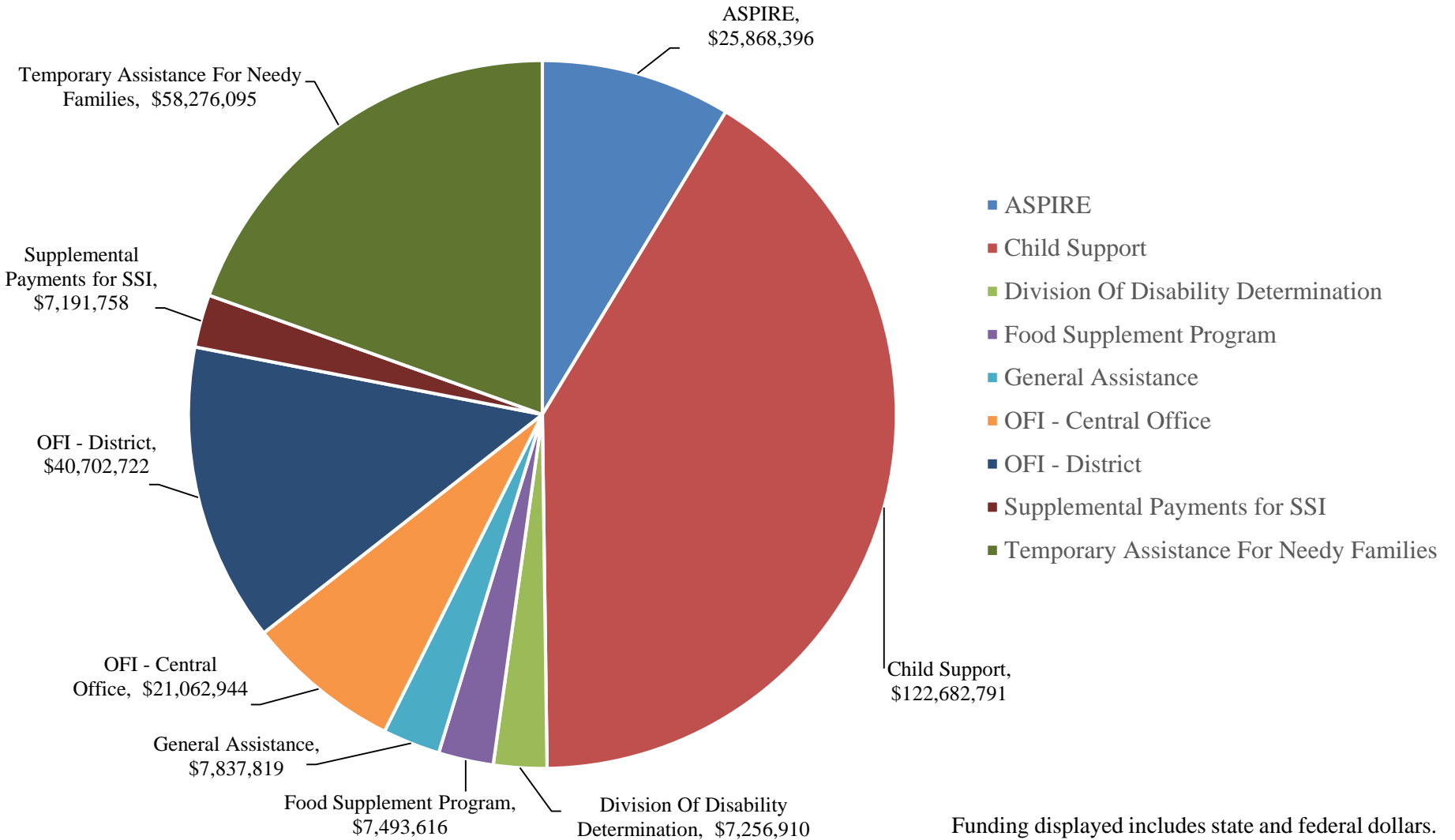


# Office for Family Independence

The Office for Family Independence assists Maine's citizens to meet their basic needs while supporting their path to independence and employment.

The Office at a Glance  
Permanent Positions: 824  
Limited Period Positions: 102  
SFY '20 Expenditures (all funds): \$298,373,050

# OFI: SFY '20 Expenditures by Appropriation



Funding displayed includes state and federal dollars.

# OFI: People We Serve, Services We Provide

➤ **OFI determines eligibility for three major programs:**

1. MaineCare (Maine's Medicaid program)
2. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly "food stamps")
3. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)

\* Eligibility is determined in accordance with federal and state law

➤ **OFI offers several Employment and Training Programs:**

1. ASPIRE – Additional Support for People in Retraining and Employment
2. SNAP E&T – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training
3. HOPE - Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment

➤ **OFI oversees and funds the General Assistance program** in partnership with municipalities across Maine

➤ **OFI assists parents with child support payments through the Division of Support Enforcement and Recovery** by collecting child support payments and disbursing to the custodial parent, locating missing parents and establishing paternity for children born out of wedlock.

➤ **OFI determines Social Security Disability for applicants** and processes disability claims for the Social Security Administration.

# COVID-19 Response

## **Staff and Public Safety**

- Transitioned 85% of OFI workforce to telework model, with rotational emergency coverage to continue regional office availability
- Expanded public awareness of application and communication channels such as online and telephone
- Dedicated staff from Wilton Call Center to assist CDC with contact tracing

## **Social Services Supports for COVID-positive individuals**

- OFI and DHHS worked to implement social supports to ensure individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 or were deemed a close contact had the support they needed to safely isolate or quarantine. This work includes providing shelter, food, transportation, cultural brokering, and education and outreach.
- OFI and DHHS partners with multiple agencies and community-based organizations to deliver the services.
- To date, this work has served over 4000 Maine residents.

# COVID-19 Response

## **Policy Changes in Response to the Pandemic**

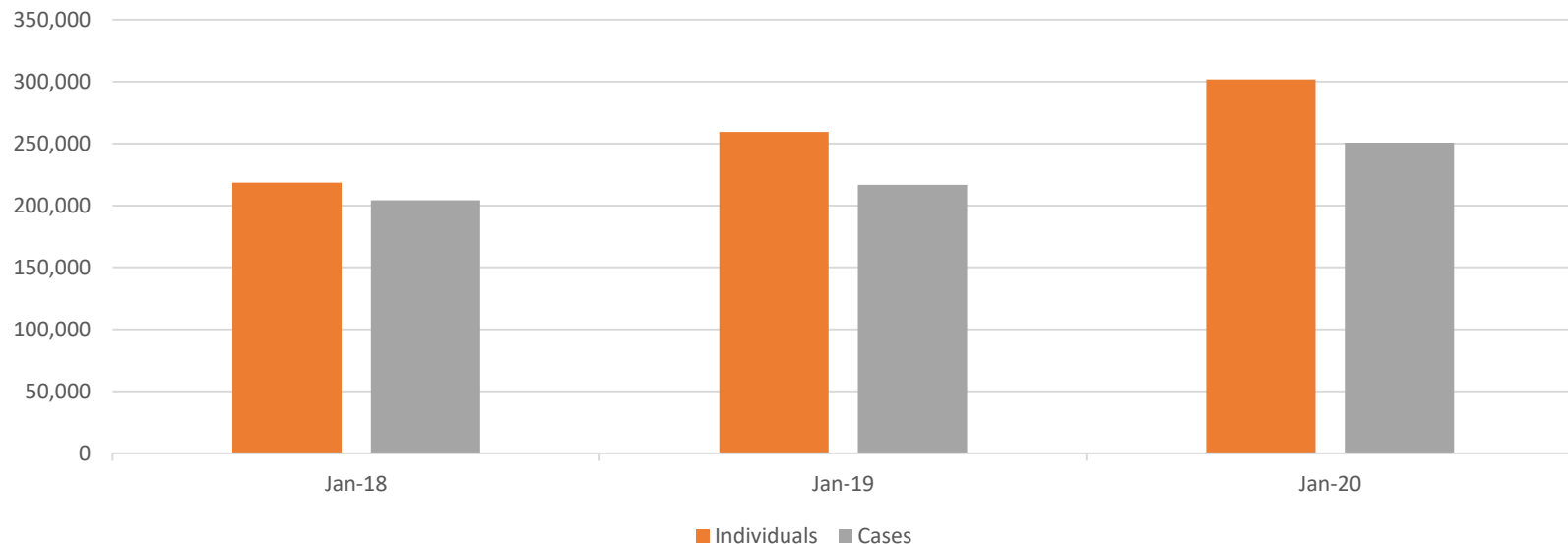
All eligible federal waivers to support the public well-being were explored with most implemented, such as:

- Non-closure of Medicaid services
- Maximum SNAP benefits to all eligible households
- Launched a Pandemic – Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program to feed school-aged children learning from home
- Implemented accommodations to support participants with TANF work compliance guidelines
- Executive order to support municipalities and tribes for General Assistance

# OFI: MaineCare Eligibility Determinations

**OFI received more than 93,000 applications for MaineCare coverage in 2020.** Eligibility Specialists determine eligibility for nearly all groups and services including but not limited to: parents, children, nursing homes, residential care, Medicaid disability, Medicare Savings Program and CHIP. All financial eligibility is determined by OFI. MaineCare Expansion determinations began in January 2019.

MaineCare – Individual and Case Counts



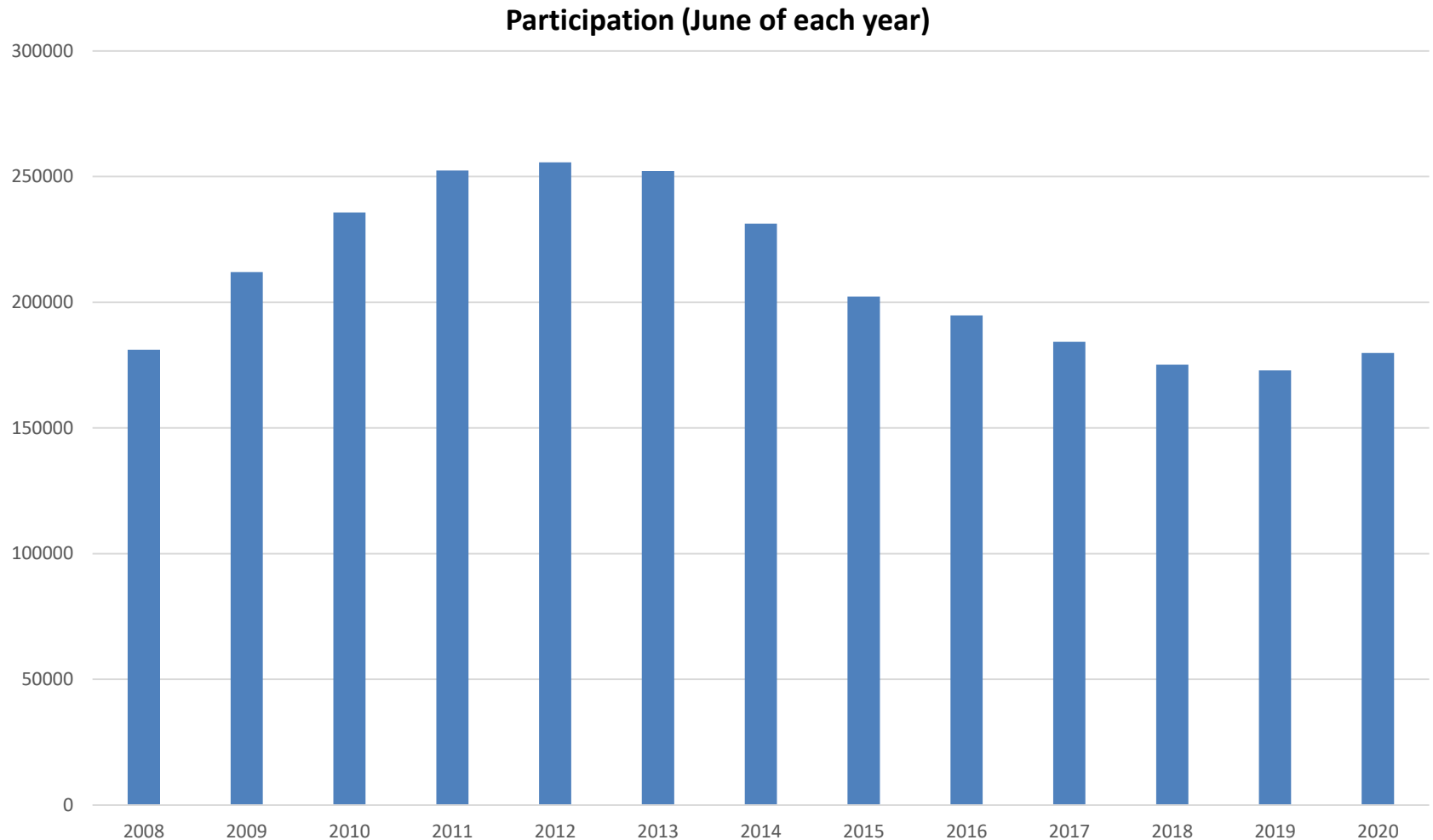
# OFI: Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP)

## **Maine's SNAP program is known as Food Supplement - formerly known as food stamps:**

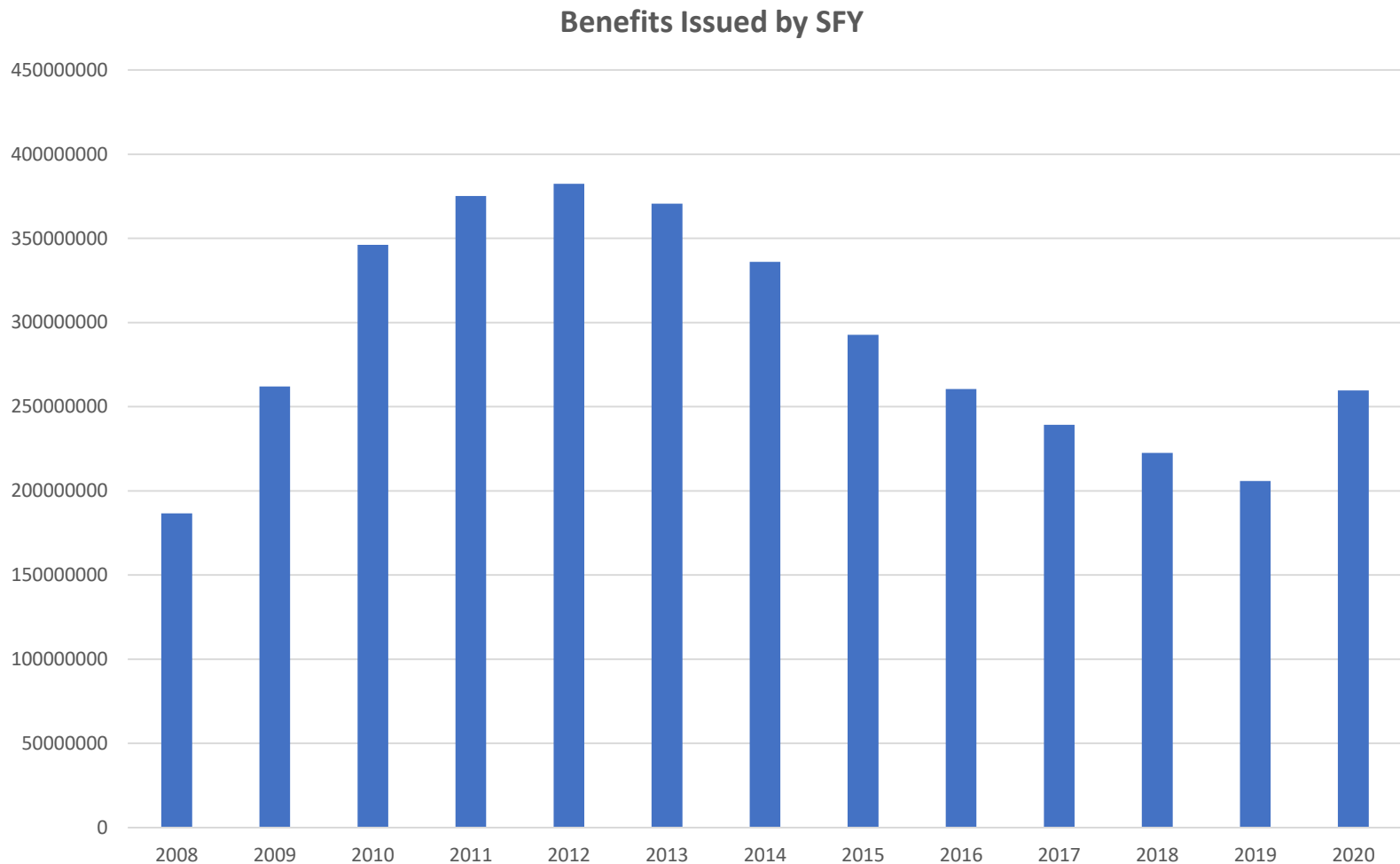
- 92,309 cases; 166,117 individuals in Maine receive Food Supplement benefits
- Benefits are 100% federally-funded; there is a state-funded program for non-citizens with legal status
- States administer the program and determine eligibility
- Maine also administers a contract for SNAP-Education
- States fund 50% of the administrative costs
- Total federal benefits in SFY20 = \$260 million



# OFI: Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP)

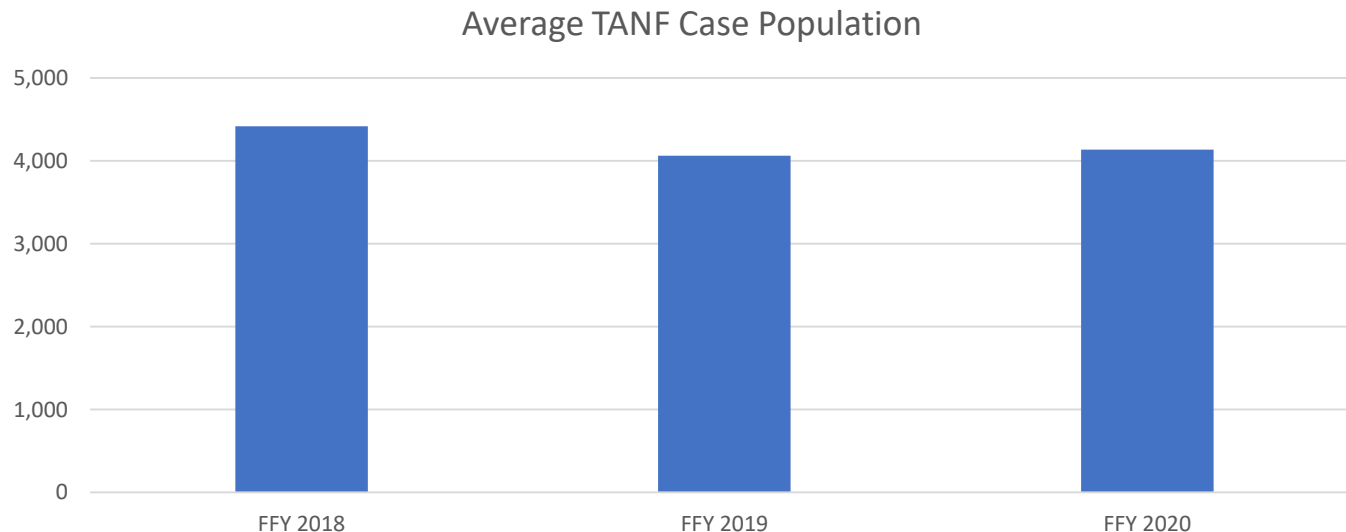


# OFI: Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP)



# OFI: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

**Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) provides temporary cash benefits for up to 60 months to families with minor children in the home. It is a federally funded program through a \$78 million block grant which requires a state Maintenance of Effort (MOE) equal to \$37.5 million**



# Employment and Training Programs

OFI provides support to families to help navigate and fund education and training programs. These supports meet the family's needs during classes and work. These supports include: child care; transportation; course tools and fees and much more.

## ASPIRE

- Most adults receiving TANF are required to work with the ASPIRE Program. ASPIRE provides support through case management, job training, education, support and employment services provided by Fedcap, Inc.

## SNAP Employment & Training

- SNAP-E&T is an optional program for adults receiving SNAP benefits. Services are provided by multiple vendors around the state, including Goodwill of Northern New England and Family Futures Downeast.

## HOPE Program

- State staff conduct eligibility determinations and navigator services are provided by Maine Educational Opportunity Center (MEOC) who are available to meet students at education institutions around the state.

# SNAP Employment and Training Program

- Helps SNAP (Maine Food Supplement) recipients with job training and education so they can find and keep good paying jobs.
- Reimburses job search training and assistance, vocational training (including Adult Education, certificate and degree programs), job retention services, case management, and more including reimbursement for transportation, childcare, books, tools, and equipment. s of training opportunities available at no cost.
- Expects to serve 395 participants in FFY'21
- Includes statewide programming by these contracted providers:
  - Goodwill NNE
  - Axiom Technologies
  - Community Concepts
  - Maine Educational Opportunity Center
  - Sunrise County Economic Council (Family Futures Downeast and Start Up Downeast)
  - Partnership with Maine DOL Competitive Skills Scholarship Program
- For more information see:  
<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofi/programs-services/food-supplement/fset>

# Improving the Future of Our Families - Family Futures Downeast (FFD)



## **Two Generation (also called Whole Family) Strategies: Helping Parents & Children**

- Living in poverty can be passed from one generation to the next. Many parents have a history of generations of poverty, trauma, exposure to violence, substance use disorder, and a profound loss of hope generated by those experiences. To stop the cycle, Family Futures Downeast believes that children should be empowered at the same time as their parents.
- FFD creates access to postsecondary and workforce opportunities for parents with young children. In the first year, parents enroll in specially-designed college classes while their children benefit from outstanding, high-quality early education programs at centers on campus and through home visits. Students receive transitional supports in their second year, as they continue in a degree program or as they move to increased employment.
- Through cohort and peer supports and intensive structured coaching that builds skills, and by removing logistical and financial barriers, FFD gives parents the opportunity to imagine and pursue the future they want for themselves and their children.
- This nationally recognized program receives most of its funding through OFI's SNAP E&T and TANF programs
- For more information, visit:  
<http://www.familyfuturesdowneast.org/>

# The HOPE Program

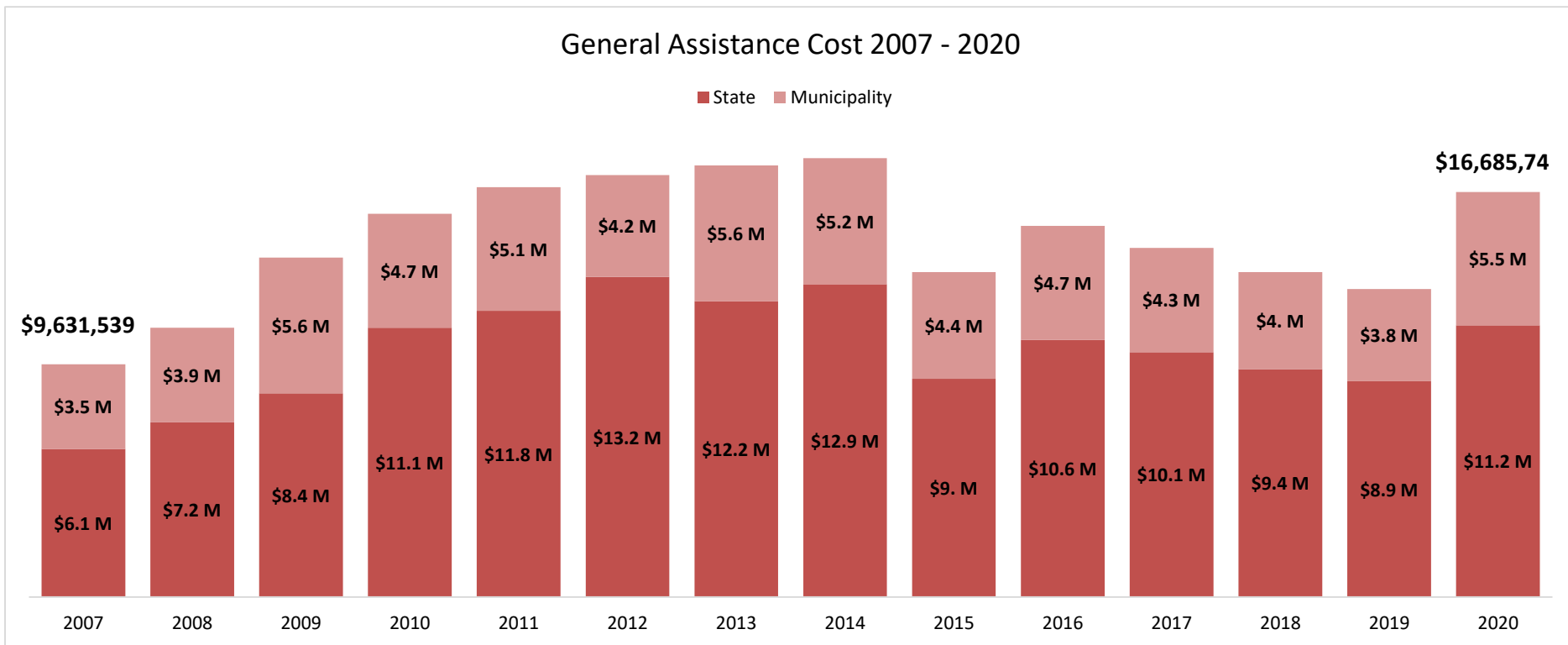
- **Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment (HOPE)** is a workforce development program aimed at helping parents with low incomes graduate from meaningful higher education. By offering financial supports for education-related costs and providing higher education navigators, HOPE helps parents access and complete valuable training and education for various occupations. HOPE's graduates have enhanced skills that allow them to become more competitive and advance within jobs in Maine's economy.
- **Who qualifies?** Parents and specified relatives of minor children who are Maine residents, are accepted to or enrolled in a postsecondary education program, meet HOPE income requirements, and are not receiving TANF/PaS benefits may qualify.
- **How many students can be served?** Open to 500 students statewide, HOPE is currently helping 360 students. Of these, 115 are in bachelor's programs related to health care, technology or engineering, 195 are pursuing associate degrees, and 50 are in short-term occupational trainings.
- To learn more about the HOPE Program
  - call: (207) 624-4170
  - email: [hope.dhhs@maine.gov](mailto:hope.dhhs@maine.gov)
  - visit: [www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofc/programs-services/hope](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofc/programs-services/hope)
  - or find us on **Facebook**



# OFI: General Assistance (GA)

General Assistance is administered by municipalities. Municipalities determine eligibility (based on State regulations) and share the cost of providing the benefit. The State pays 70% of the cost as of July 2015. The municipalities are responsible for the remaining 30%.

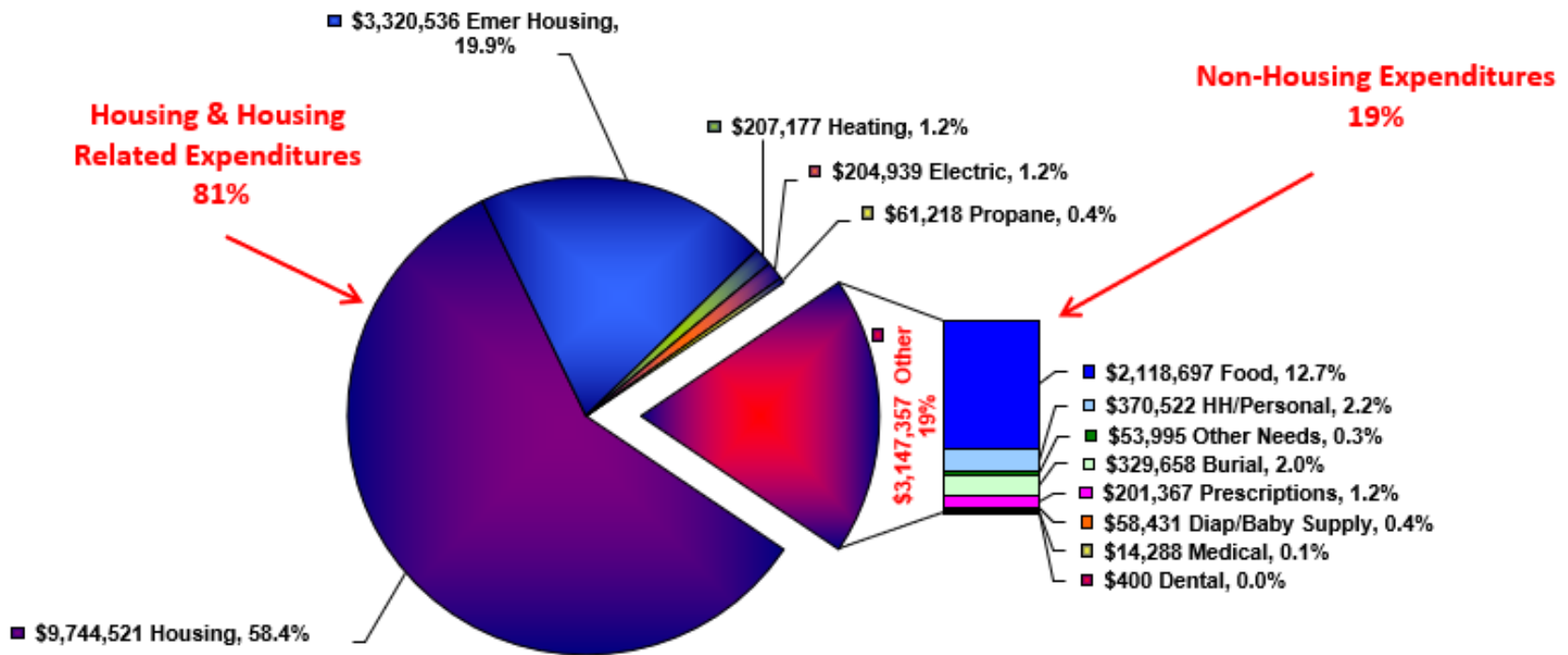
The State portion of total GA reimbursements requested for SFY20, was \$11.2 million





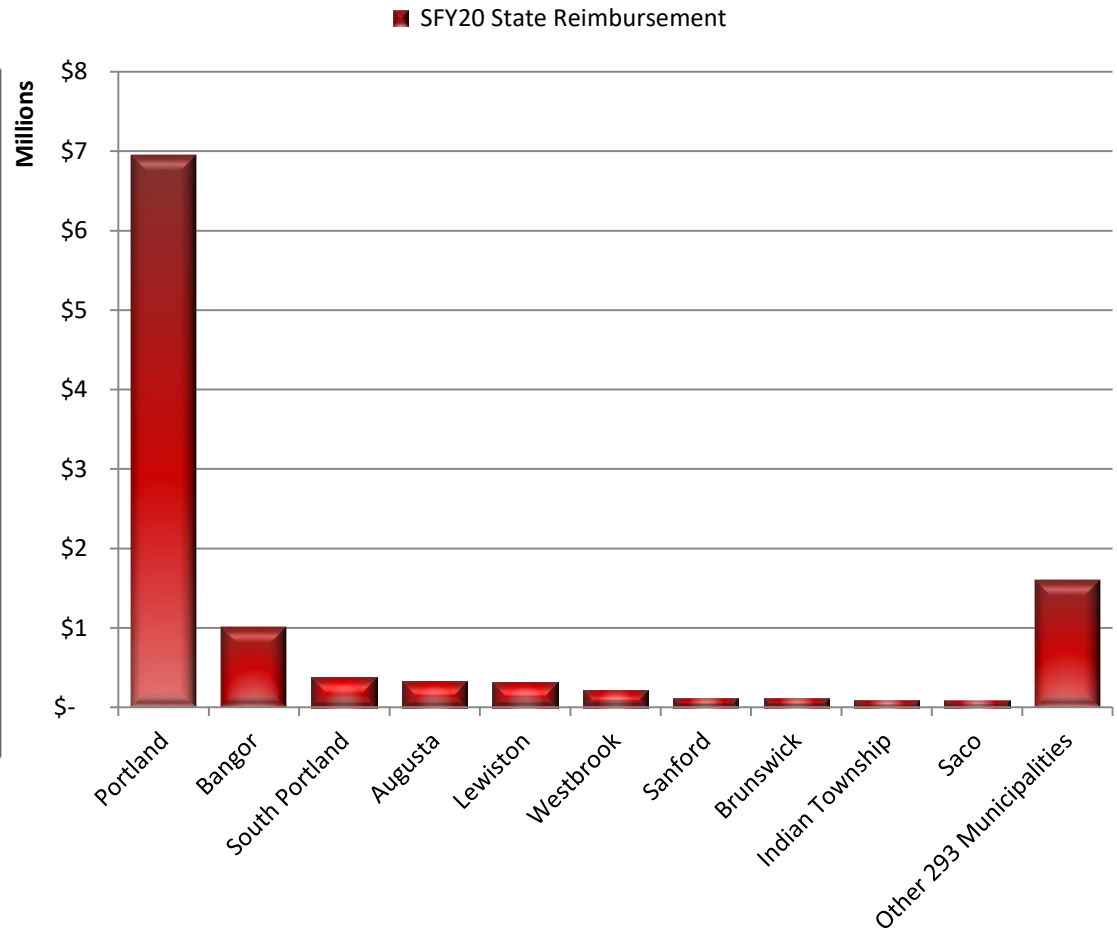
# OFI: GA Expenditure Breakdown

- Historically, approximately 80% of General Assistance dollars have been utilized for housing or housing related expenses. This has increased to 81% in SFY20. A breakdown of the total (state and municipal) \$16.6 million in General Assistance spending can be seen below.



# OFI: General Assistance – top spending towns

GA Spending: Top Ten Municipalities	SFY20 State Reimbursement
Portland	\$ 6,954,604
Bangor	\$ 1,004,480
South Portland	\$ 375,650
Augusta	\$ 329,915
Lewiston	\$ 316,715
Westbrook	\$ 220,468
Sanford	\$ 119,882
Brunswick	\$ 114,500
Indian Township	\$ 91,462
Saco	\$ 87,642
Other 293 Municipalities	\$ 1,599,534



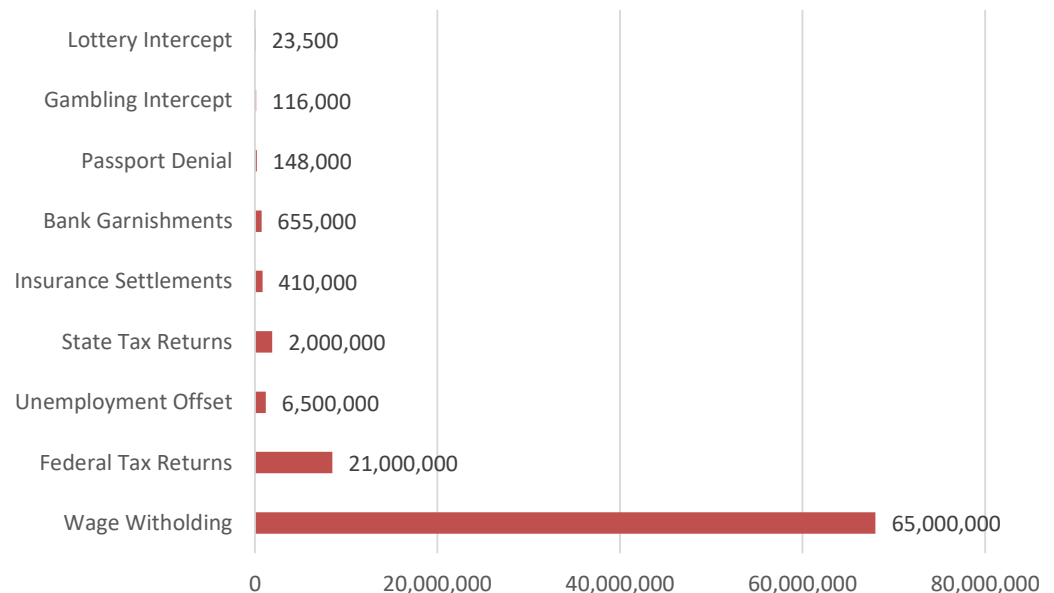
# Division of Support Enforcement and Recovery (DSEER)

- Locates parents and establishes paternity for children of unwed parents
- Establishes, modifies and enforces child support orders (50,000 enforcement actions annually)
- Collects and distributes child support to custodial parents - **\$101M SFY '20**

## What we did in SFY 2020:

- Collected \$120 million to support children
- Managed 1,600 paternity cases
- Oversaw 1,200 cases needing support orders
- Collected child support for 40,000 cases with enforceable orders

Child Support Collections by Action



# OFI: Client Service Activity

Function	Description	Results
<b>Statewide Phone Queue</b>	A virtual call center environment handles most incoming OFI calls and technology automates some client transactions and allow real-time tracking and monitoring of calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Approximately 600,000 calls come into the queue annually.</li> <li>✓ Staffing averages 55 Eligibility Workers and 45 triage staff daily.</li> </ul>
<b>Statewide Document Imaging</b>	Mail is routed through a central processing center where it is scanned and indexed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Scans and indexes an average of 35,000 client documents monthly.</li> </ul>
<b>Siebel Workflow Management</b>	Allows for the statewide distribution of applications and reviews, as well as real-time tracking of cases, staff performance, and dashboards/management reporting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Approximately 116,000 applications received per year can be prioritized and tracked.</li> </ul>
<b>Online Services</b>	My Maine Connection provides a streamlined, web-based platform for clients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Approximately 6200 My Maine Connection client submissions (apps, reviews, changes) received monthly.</li> </ul>

# Accessing Programs

## **Online Portal for Applications: My Maine Connection**

- My Maine Connection assists people in applying for SNAP, TANF, and MaineCare
- Users can prescreen themselves then develop a profile and fill out an application online.
- Once enrolled, case information and recertification can be accessed

Applicants can also apply by:

- Email: [Farmington.DHHS@Maine.gov](mailto:Farmington.DHHS@Maine.gov)
- Mail: Office for Family Independence, 114 Corn Shop Lane, Farmington ME
- Fax: 207-778-8429
- Phone: 1-855-797-4357
- In person at one of our 16 district offices

# CORE Training

## **CORE: Culture Of Respect and Empathy**

- In 2019, OFI staff developed the CORE training to help staff explore issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and reduce conscious and unconscious bias and stigma when working with clients that come to DHHS.
- Intensive, 4-hour training for staff conducted in small groups
- All OFI staff have now been trained, and the program has been offered across the Department. Leadership of all offices have undergone the training.

# OFI: Major Technology Initiatives

- Complete replacement of MyMaineConnection underway with target for completion in early 2022
- Notice of Decision Modernization launches January 2021
- COVID-19 Pandemic Response Efforts
  - ❑ Maximum SNAP Issuance
  - ❑ Maximum Worker Supplement Benefit
  - ❑ Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT)
  - ❑ Maintained open eligibility for MaineCare recipients
- HOPE program
- TANF Modifications - STEP & LIFT Legislative changes
- Successful conversion of the ACES eligibility determination rules engine March 2019

# Questions?

**Anthony Pelotte, Director**

