



A safe and affordable place to live for every Mainer will bolster public health and our economic recovery

Of all the things we can do for families and individuals rebuilding their economic security, safe homes that don't eat up the family budget tops the list.

Mainers' **health, wellbeing, and economic stability** all start at home. It's within our power to use federal and state dollars to **help Mainers through the current crisis and lay the groundwork for long term solutions** to Maine's enduring housing problems--and bold action on homelessness prevention, rental assistance, and affordable housing will greatly strengthen our health and economy.

A housing shortage and crisis years in the making

The pandemic has pushed Maine's longtime lack of affordable housing to a crisis point, showing us **how vulnerable our state is to a wave of evictions** and reinforcing that **housing is health care**. Job loss and reduced work hours created by the pandemic have [increased the risk of eviction](#) for low income renters. Typically, Maine sees more than 5,000 eviction cases a year. The first half of 2020 saw nearly 1,000 eviction filings, and despite some eviction protections in 2020-2021, [legal aid providers say](#) they have never been busier with requests for help with evictions.

But even before the pandemic, Maine had a **significant affordable housing shortage**. In Maine, wages [aren't high enough](#) for everyone to keep a roof over their heads. On average, Mainers need an annual income of \$42,489 to pay for a two bedroom home, but a typical low-income renter makes only \$35,098; many make far less. Nearly 60% of extremely low-income households [contribute more than 50%](#) of their income to rent, **getting by without other basic necessities**.

Even for renters who have Section 8 housing vouchers or other rental assistance, **finding an affordable home is hard**, for a many reasons: the rent may exceed what Section 8 will pay; the apartment may not meet Section 8 housing quality standards; and **some landlords refuse** to participate in these programs.



Maine should eliminate voucher discrimination

"I've watched friends who had vouchers die on the street while trying to find housing. I have gotten incredibly depressed because no landlord will rent to me.

It has made me feel hopeless and worthless, like I must not be a good person if people don't want to rent to me. We need to end voucher discrimination in Maine so people like me don't have to stay in homelessness for years upon years."

-Leanna

Safe, affordable housing is key to public health, greater equity, and economic security for Mainers rebuilding in 2021

Fortunately, Maine is receiving **federal pandemic support that can act as a springboard** for bold action to increase access to affordable housing. The legislature should pass a slate of bills that leverage state investment in housing to [reduce poverty](#), increase economic mobility, and protect public health.

Affordable housing is also **vital to achieving racial equity**. Fully [26% of Maine's homeless population are Black or African American](#) even though they make up only 1% of Maine's population. According to Pine Tree Legal Aid, between 2017 and 2019, 12% of households they represented in eviction court were non-white and nearly 50% reported a disability. These statistics follow a national trend where Black community members, Indigenous and Tribal members and People of Color face persistent housing discrimination and economic barriers to stable housing, deepening inequality and contributing to a growing wealth gap.

Opportunities for the 130th Legislature

- **LD 1180 - An Act to Prohibit Discrimination in Housing Based on a Person's Source of Income (Rep. Ben Collings)** Limits the instances where a landlord could refuse to participate in Section 8 and other rental assistance programs. For example, a landlord could not refuse to participate in the program because they did not want the apartment to be inspected, because they refused to make necessary repairs, or because they refused to fill out the necessary paperwork to participate in the program.
- **LD 1508 - An Act to Prevent Homelessness by Establishing an Eviction Mediation Program (Sen. Anne Carney)** Helps people who are facing eviction find and access resources like legal aid or rental assistance, to stay housed, and the opportunity to request mediation. These changes to the legal process will give tenants more opportunities to work out a solution with their landlord or lender before going to court.
- **LD 473 - An Act To Create the Maine Rental Assistance and Voucher Guarantee Program (Rep. Victoria Morales)** Establishes a network of housing counselors to help people find and keep stable housing and lays the groundwork for a long term rental assistance program. By helping Mainers find housing, including those with federal housing vouchers, housing counselors will ensure Maine doesn't leave federal housing funds on the table when so many Mainers can't afford rent.
- **LD 211 - An Act to Support Emergency Shelter Access for Persons Experiencing Homelessness (Rep. Kristen Cloutier)** Shelters are the crucial emergency resource in our housing system that assist Maine families in achieving basic safety and security and taking the first steps back to permanent, stable housing and economic security. LD 211 allocates \$3 million in additional funding to homeless shelters in Maine.
- **LD 1076 An Act to Support the Operations of Youth Shelters in Maine (Sen. Nate Libby)** Changes outdated rules that put the safety of youth experiencing homelessness at risk. Increases the funds provided to homeless youth shelters from \$2 million annually to \$2.5 million annually.
- **LD 1656 - An Act To Build Energy-efficient Affordable Housing (Rep. Rebecca Millett)** Recognizes the opportunity presented by new housing production to address affordability, efficiency, and workforce development at once by funding new affordable, energy-efficient apartments, creating good, stable jobs, and thousands of new units to help reduce Maine's affordable housing waitlist.