**Maine Homeless Policy Committee – Priorities & Strategies for the 131st Legislature**

The Maine Homeless Policy Committee has established a list of State Legislature policy priorities/bill themes. Each priority is sequenced with the Goals of Maine’s Plan to End and Prevent Homelessness.

**Priorities:**

* **Fund emergency shelters. Develop longer-term sustainable resources for emergency shelters, promote the transition to low-barrier shelters and non-congregate shelters, and fund shelter operations and further best practices.**
* **End outdoor homelessness. Advocate for resources to establish 30-40 motel or non-congregate accommodations across the state for Long Term Stayers who remain unsheltered due to a lack of access to shelter or housing.**
* **Ensure an adequate supply of housing. Increase the supply of low-income and supportive housing.**
* **Ensure there is an adequate safety net. Improve and simplify General Assistance (GA) laws/policies to remove barriers and simplify access/use specifically for housing.**
* **Create Flexible Outreach Workers or Intensive Case Managers. Use these positions to engage challenging populations, ensure continuity of care, and stabilize people in permanent supportive housing.**
* **Decriminalize homelessness. Housing is less expensive and much more effective than jail. Properly serve people with serious and persistent mental illness and substance use disorders and solve for housing in Maine’s approach.**

1. **Goal I - Shelters/coordination from homelessness through to housing/sharing of best practices:**

* Develop longer-term, sustainable resources for shelters, including low-barrier and non-congregate shelters. Fund shelter operations and further best practices. Implement best practices; scaffold up funding to fully deliver these best practices.
  + Invest in adapting shelter settings to lower barriers and accommodate needs.
  + Ensure there are warming centers and other sufficient locations for people to go in all worrisome weather and look to ensure an adequate supply of accessible sanitation facilities for people who are outside.
  + Boost outreach and housing first response to unsheltered homelessness and encampments. Be proactive, preventive, and solution oriented.
* Set aside resources to establish 30-40 motel or non-congregate accommodations in areas across the state for people languishing outside - Long Term Stayers who remain unsheltered due to a lack of access to shelter or housing. Hoteling people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, when done correctly, has been a successful intervention with long term benefits because of being person centered and trauma informed. Continue this practice for this specific population and include wrap around resources services adequate to meet the needs while placed in hotels. Examine the needs of older and medically compromised individuals.

1. **Goal II Housing and Rental Subsidies:**

* Increase the supply of low-income and supportive housing.
  + Make sure we achieve the gains from LD 2003 which allows for the development of duplexes, accessory dwelling units, and in some cases, 3- or 4-unit buildings.
  + Support affordable housing bond.
* Ensure there is an adequate safety net. Examine barriers including restrictions that result in people being barred from General Assistance (GA) as a safety net for 120 days.
  + Simplify the GA law so it is easy to read and interpret, and particularly – follow, with special emphasis with on emergency assistance portions of the law.
  + Eliminate the dual penalty that can result in people losing GA and Food Stamps for a technicality.
  + Ensure state enforcement of GA policies. Ensure clear and supportive appeal process.
  + Look at a longer presumptive eligibility period – 60 or 90 days – particularly for housing assistance.
  + Ensure all people are served locally.
    - Ensure training can be provided so GA is widely understood and any of the support providers are able to intervene and help.
  + Ensure emergency assistance can be used for eviction prevention to pay rent or arrears.
  + Examine the needs of people just over income qualifications (homeowners who can’t stay due to building shortcomings or substandard living situations, and older populations). Make sure people in challenging situations have a “helper” (community resource navigator) with navigating resources and meeting needs.

1. **Goal III Support Services for SPMI, SUD, TBI:**

* Create Flexible Outreach Workers or Intensive Case Managers both for permanent supportive housing (to fill in gaps in MaineCare funded services) and to expand homeless youth and adult resources in Maine (to enhance HUD investments from the YHDP). Have this be a general appropriations bill covering all populations. Look to other state models to replicate in Maine.
  + Create positions similar to ICMs to fill gaps in the continuum. Ensure they have flexibility for continuity of care.
  + Ensure ICMs or Flexible Outreach Workers are community-based.
  + Ensure ICMs or Flexible Outreach Workers are collectively able to cover the state.
  + Ensure at least some ICMs or Flexible Outreach Workers are placed or fairly distributed to agencies to pay for flexible case management services. This will provide homeless service agencies flexible funds to hire people who can meet client’s housing and stability needs. Make sure hiring protocols do not require a mental health license – set this effort up to hire people who are good at going out and engaging the population and providing outreach support.
  + Examine the needs of elderly and medically compromised individuals.
* Make providers whole for rate shortcomings for the MaineCare HOME program through a state appropriation.

1. **Goal IV Addressing underlying issues of homelessness:**

* Decriminalize homelessness. Focus specifically on the decriminalization aspects which may be more feasible and may save money. Consider aspects of Cori Bush’s Federal Homeless Bill of Rights. Align with Rep. Victoria Morales’ previous legislation*.* [17A in the Maine Criminal Courts – reference AG template for municipalities].
  + Look at this as an umbrella approach – an overarching principle of the other legislation.
  + It may be possible to include the right to counsel here (this is to slowly build understanding and buy in for future legislation).
  + Consider the right to shelter or housing.
  + Be proactive with resolving evictions.
  + Fund public defender office in the state.
  + Increase funding for civil legal services.
  + Ensure this is examined through a racial equity lens.
* Find pathways to strict data requirement such that there is real time data about evictions for landlords, but longer-term issues can be expunged.
  + Create data protection for tenants similar to data protections for borrowers.