



Preble Street

## Homeless Voices for Justice

*Maine's homeless communities' voice on homeless issues*

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Preble Street Homeless Voices for Justice (HVJ) is a grassroots group that works for social change on behalf of people who struggle with homelessness and poverty. HVJ is led by a board of advocates, who have all experienced homelessness, supported by staff of Preble Street. The founding chapter in Portland has existed for over 17 years, with other chapters started in Augusta, Brunswick, and Lewiston. Our goal is to build a coalition for and of homeless people throughout Maine, and to empower people whose first-hand perspective has often been absent in the development of policies and programs that impact their social and economic well being.

HVJ empowers the most vulnerable and poor of the community by:

1. Giving them a collective voice in the system which critically impacts them
2. Educating the community on current issues
3. Engaging in social action, in accordance with the philosophy that true social change can occur only when those affected by an unjust system are involved in addressing those injustices
4. Collaborating with other community organizations and contributing to broad-based coalition-building

Issues on which we have significantly impacted public policies include:

### **Shelter and Housing**

- We have successfully protected Portland's tradition of offering shelter to all who need it. We are the only consumer representatives on state, regional and local decision-making bodies coordinating services to homeless people and implementing Maine's plan to end homelessness. We have successfully advocated for specific funding and housing developments to meet the needs of those who have been homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless.
- Our campaign to end the common practice of rooming-house landlords evicting people without notice or due process resulted in a Portland ordinance requiring rooming houses to be licensed and to respect basic tenant rights. We were also successful in ending the state's practice of licensing these places to operate as hotels when they are actually providing long-term housing to low-income people.

### **Voter Registration and Voter Education**

We conduct the ongoing "You Don't Need a Home to Vote" voter registration campaign, which has registered over 2,000 homeless and low-income voters. We organize candidates' forums and other educational efforts around specific elections. Our Candidates' Breakfasts and Voters' Forums over the past years have attracted nearly all the candidates for Governor, US Congress, the State Legislature, and municipal councils.

### **Protecting the Civil and Human Rights of Homeless and Low-Income People**

Our campaign to end hate violence against homeless people succeeded in passing groundbreaking state legislation in 2006 to address the frightening trend—both nationally and right here in Maine—of anti-homeless violence. The new law added homeless victims to a list of groups who are vulnerable to bias-motivated violence, a factor which may now be considered in the sentencing of crimes. Our campaign has had many other components, including community education, collaborations with youth, with Maine's Attorney General and the Center for the Prevention of Hate, and we are now providing statewide training to police cadets on homelessness and on homeless crime victims' barriers to reporting crimes.

### **Access to Health Care, including Mental Health and Addiction Services**

We organize legislative testimony, community education, and media work seeking specific policy improvements and reforms to benefit low-income people in these areas. Annual events include the Longest Day of Homelessness Demonstration on the Summer Solstice and the HVJ Holiday Wish Press Event in December.

***“Will Work for Change”***