

THE HOMELESS VOICES FOR JUSTICE NEWSLETTER

OUR VOICE, YOUR VOICE

June 2022



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Coming in Fall 2022

- Candidates' Forums
- You Don't Need a Home to Vote Campaign
- Advocacy Alerts

THE BASICS

Who we are: Homeless Voices for Justice (HVJ) is a grassroots organization that works for social change with, and on behalf of, people who struggle with homelessness and poverty. We seek to empower people whose perspectives are often excluded from the development of policies and programs that impact their social and economic well-being. We hope to assert ourselves and our interests in Maine politics through protest, education, positive policy change, and reform.

When we meet: Every Monday, 9:30-11:30 am at 55 Portland Street; both virtual and in-person options are available; all are welcome to attend.

Come talk with us: Interested in advocacy or HVJ? Questions about what we do? Issues you would like to see us address? Email HVJ@preblestreet.org!

HVJ ADVOCATES

HVJ Leaders:	HVJ Members:
Ben Martineau	Lisa Franklin
Carolyn Silvius	Richard Reamer
Cher Harkins	Wesley Royal
Jim Devine	
Mike Stuckmeyer	

WELCOME, TAYLOR!



As part of her role as the new Advocacy Outreach Team Leader at Preble Street, Taylor Cray will support the work of Homeless Voices for Justice. Taylor is deeply committed to the health and well-being of the folks who live here in Maine. She attended the University of Maine at Orono, receiving a bachelor's degree in Political Science and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and a master's degree in Global Policy. She has spent most of her adult life engaged in advocacy, with a focus on reproductive justice and voting rights. She is excited to learn from and work alongside the powerful advocates of HVJ!

SUMMER SOLSTICE: THE LONGEST DAY OF HOMELESSNESS

By Jim Devine

Every year on the Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year, Homeless Voices for Justice hosts a day long vigil to call attention to the ongoing crises of homelessness.

The basic message is that although many people tend to focus their concern during the winter when people experiencing homelessness are exposed to brutal cold, homelessness is also potentially fatal during the summer.

Homelessness needs society's attention all year long.

This year's vigil will last all day, from 8am-5pm on **Friday, June 17 at Tommy's Park in Portland**. We have invited a number of allied groups to table and have the opportunity to discuss their mission with the public.

From 12pm-1pm we have invited a number of politicians, such as Governor Mills, Mayor Snyder, and various City Councilors and State Representatives to speak.

We also wish to give people with lived experience with homelessness the opportunity to share their stories.

Several advocates who play music will also be singing songs, particularly ones related to homelessness.

Please join us on June 17!



*Jim playing guitar at the 2016
Summer Solstice Vigil*

HOTEL SHELTERS CLOSING

By Cher Harkins

We wanted to give you all a brief update on the Portland and South Portland hotel situation.

PLEASE respect the buildings and the people who work there. PLEASE respect the local businesses and their customers. Pick up your trash and be mindful of your manners. If nobody has a reason to make complaints maybe we can find a solution to the soon to be lack of hotels for the homeless community.

There are currently hundreds of individuals being temporarily sheltered in area hotels. This includes new asylees. HVJ suggests you call Portland City Hall, South Portland City Hall, your case worker, Preble Street Outreach Collaborative, local churches, or Maine 211 to get up-to-date instructions as to what you need to know.

HVJ wants you to know that various organizations are working to try to find a solution to this emergency situation but at this time the hotels will be closing to the homeless community in June. For the time being the asylees will be staying where they are. As soon as HVJ has information we will share it during our outreach. Please feel free to approach any of our Advocates when you see us. Please all of you, stay safe.



OUR CITY COUNCIL

By Ben Martineau

Over the months of February and March, HVJ met with some of our City councilors individually, and with the Mayor and interim City Manager together.

The common issues we brought to all the discussions were the Homeless Services Center (HSC) and the proposed shelter licensing. The shelter licensing proposal was in early June.

Councilor Roberto Rodriguez was the first City official we meet with. He feels the \$93,000 for the inspector could be used for funding with more prevalent City services.

Councilor Tae Chong, associated with the Greater Portland Metro Board, suggested reaching out to them for a possible solution with the needed transportation to and from the new HSC. He also stated the reform to the City's General Assistance is already underway and he is open to any suggestions for that, and any communication in general. He sees GA shifting towards more diversion, that is, helping those in need of assistance before they're out of a home.

Councilor Victoria Pelletier said she wasn't involved with the Service Center decision and prefers the smaller scattered sites formula. She also said a lot of the City's written language needs more specific defining.

Councilor Pious Ali feels the key work now is to go forward, implementing possible best policies and practices into the design and operations of the new HSC

City Councilor Anna Trevorrow feels a reworking of the licensing, in general, needs to be started, postponing the City's June decision, assembling a working group, and changing zoning in the City in order to put equity in future shelter placements.

Mayor Kate Snyder and interim City Manager Danielle West appeared to share in having conservative views on everything discussed. A specific example of gentrification was brought to light by one of our advocates and Mayor Snyder said she would take a closer look into it.

All in all, I found the meetings generally productive. The key idea in arranging these meetings was to know folks on a better individual basis and to have an open communication with them all. We leave the choice with each person to whether they heard us or listened to our views of the plights of people experiencing homelessness.

DIGNITY PILOT

By Jim Devine

One of the many interesting projects Homeless Voices for Justice is working on is called the Dignity Pilot. This bill — LD 1294, submitted by our ally, Representative Rachel Talbot Ross — will have the Maine Human Rights Commission **investigate claims of discrimination against people due to their housing status**. Homeless Voices for Justice has been working with the able assistance and leadership of Jon Bradley, former Associate Director of Preble Street, on this project.

Discrimination can take various forms and adds greatly to the burden experienced by a person already dealing with the challenges of being homeless. Examples include being told that an address is needed for opening a bank account, renting storage, or filling out applications for housing or services.

Becoming employed is certainly a way for people to end their homelessness, so facing discrimination while attempting to secure employment is unfair. And dealing with negative attitudes from staff in stores or restaurants can break anyone's spirit.

Homeless Voices for Justice plans to meet with staff at Logan Place, Huston Commons, Florence House, Milestone, Amistad, and the Preble Street Street Outreach Collaborative because we believe that those working day-to-day with the homeless have the best chance of receiving claims of discrimination.

To be clear, there is no compensation available to those filing claims, but it is **an opportunity to make the legislature aware of discrimination the homeless face** with the possibility of enacting a Homeless Bill of Rights.

Anyone interested in getting help filing a claim can contact the Maine Human Rights Commission at 207-624-8728 or Homeless Voices for Justice at 207-775-0026 or email hvj@preblestreet.org.

HOMELESS SERVICES CENTER UPDATE

By Ben Martineau

On March 29 there was a ground breaking ceremony performed by the City of Portland on the site of what will be the City's Homeless Services Center at 654 Riverside Street.

Cianbro Construction will be building the new structure, estimated to be completed in a year's time. According to WMTW Channel 8 news, \$6.5 million, about a quarter of the estimated \$25 million price tag, will be coming from emergency COVID relief funds.

TV 8 also stated that when completed, the Center will house medical, dental, mental health, substance use, employment, and housing assistance services.

I attended a working group in mid-December of last year to learn the initial design and operations, and to offer suggestions and concerns with the project. Three more workshops involving site, layout design, and operations are to be planned.

Riverside Street is a reality. Now we need to assert ourselves, working with the City to produce optimal plans and procedures with it.



Ben at City Hall

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