



## Preble Street 131<sup>st</sup> Legislative Priorities

*The mission of Preble Street is to provide accessible, barrier-free services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty and to advocate for solutions to these problems.*

In the 131<sup>st</sup> legislative session of the Maine Legislature, Preble Street aims to support legislative efforts centered around the perennial issues impacting some of the most vulnerable of Maine's community – the multi-faceted challenges of homelessness and housing, food insecurity, and racial equity.

1) *Homelessness:*

- **Expand funding for shelters across Maine.** Shelter is the initial entry point to a continuum of housing solutions that will resolve homelessness in Maine. We are at a crisis point, reflected in an inability to meet the totality of individuals' and families' shelter needs, even as dedicated social services agencies work together to pool resources and provide wraparound support.

Preble Street and coalition partners secured an early win in the 131<sup>st</sup> session with the passage of a heating assistance bill that will provide significant short-term relief. LD3 allocates temporary funds for shelters, hotels, warming centers, and other short-term housing options to address the emergency status of the unhoused community in the state through April 30<sup>th</sup> of this year.

**Corresponding legislation: LD 3: An Act to Establish the Winter Energy Relief Payment Program to Aid Residents with High Heating Costs and to Finalize the COVID Pandemic Relief Payment Program Signed into law 01/04/23, sponsored by House Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross and Senate President Troy Jackson**

- **Create funding for Site-based Housing First.** In the face of a glaring shortage of low-income, affordable housing options across the state, we must commit to robust state funding to strengthen existing shelters and to thoughtfully create **site-based Housing First options** as we strive to meet the 20,000 affordable housing units needed in Maine. A Housing First Fund will be established, intending to provide an ongoing source of revenue to fund 24-hour, site-based operating support to end chronic homelessness. Current estimates suggest the need for about 400 units of Housing First, which translates to the establishment of 12-15 properties throughout the State.

**Corresponding Legislation: LD1293: An Act to End Chronic Homelessness by Establishing the Housing First Fund Sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine, Co-sponsored by Senator Matthew Pouliot**

- **Decriminalize homelessness.** Among the most vulnerable in our society, unsheltered people deserve the protection of **decriminalization legislation** that builds upon the last session's support of law enforcement crisis protocols utilized when encountering the homeless. People experiencing unsheltered homelessness should not be penalized for conducting activities essential to daily living. Recent municipalities' enforcement of camping policies on public property, issuance of criminal trespass orders, and restrictions create a hostile environment difficult to challenge because these governmental actions fall outside due process procedures. This bill will establish a new affirmative defense based on an individual's unhoused status for the crimes of criminal trespass and aggravated criminal trespass.

**Corresponding Legislation: LR1357: An Act to Decriminalize Homelessness, sponsored by House Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross**

- **Provide more critical supports for unsheltered people.** Unsheltered homelessness is on the rise throughout the state with over 100 individuals unsheltered in Portland. The inability of traditional shelters to accommodate acute Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder symptoms is a leading contributing factor to unsheltered homelessness. Funding is needed to **support programs such as Elena's Way that provides low barrier, 24/7 shelter, comprehensive Case Management and Daily Living Support Services to individuals experiencing homelessness with complex medical, mental health, and/or substance use-related needs.** This program will provide a critical safety net of services for unsheltered individuals who are restricted from or unable to access other forms of shelter. Suggested by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services as complementary funding to MaineCare billable services, this legislation will ensure shelter and care for these very vulnerable individuals of whom:
  - 100% of were unsheltered prior to admission,
  - 100% are restricted from or unable to consistently access other area shelters,
  - 97% have a mental health diagnosis and 79% have a cooccurring substance use disorder.

**Corresponding Legislation: LD599: An Act to Provide Support Services for a Transitional Housing Program for Homeless Persons, sponsored by Representative Michael Brennan**

- **Expand funding with proposed modifications to the Homeless Opioid User Service Engagement (H.O.U.S.E) program,** which assists people experiencing both homelessness and substance use disorder in accessing treatment, case management, and housing. In the wake of a highly successful pilot program, new legislation will propose changes to the H.O.U.S.E program in order to streamline and strengthen the collaborative services offered by Greater Portland Health and Preble Street Health Services. These modifications will include funding for peer support, housing specialists, and community health workers in the program, and the support of a continuum of recovery MAT (Medication Assisted Treatment) options.

**Corresponding Legislation: LR1792: An Act to Establish Permanent Funding for the Homeless Opioid Users Service Engagement Project, sponsored by Representative Gattine**

## 2) *Food Insecurity:*

- **One-time capital funding for Preble Street’s Food Security Hub.** The Food Security Hub is providing the next generation of emergency food assistance to Maine. Good Shepherd Food Bank estimates that hunger in Maine rose by 25% due to the pandemic, with Cumberland County seeing the most significant increase. Additionally, Black (21.7%) and Latinx (17.2%) households were disproportionately impacted by food insecurity rates triple and double the rate of White families (7.1%), respectively. Preble Street recognizes the disparate impact of food insecurity upon BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) residents in Maine and aims to mitigate these sharp inequities. The Food Security Hub’s innovative approach to food systems and hunger through educational efforts, collaborative work with community partners, and, most importantly, the provision of fresh or preserved culturally appropriate food from local Maine farmers to those in need. In its thoughtful approach to food systems, the Food Security Hub makes a concerted effort to source from local Maine farmers, establishing a symbiotic relationship with the communities that surround us. Additionally, the Food Security Hub will be advised by the Food Justice Coalition, a group of people with lived food insecurity experiences.  
**Corresponding Legislation: TBA, sponsored by House Speaker Talbot Ross**

## 3) *Racial Equity:*

- **Tribal sovereignty for the Wabanaki people.** To acknowledge and repair the harm caused by the Indian Claims Settlement Act of 1980, we must urge Governor Mills to reconsider granting tribal sovereignty to the Wabanaki people. The Wabanaki currently hold a restricted status that does not give them a voice at the state level or allow them to govern themselves, preventing them from receiving federal funding in contrast to the other 574 federally recognized tribes across the U.S. Tribal sovereignty is a long overdue and essential move towards equity. It is also a step in formally acknowledging the Wabanaki people as thoughtful stewards of the lands now recognized as the state of Maine, long before settlers established presence here.
- **Address inequities experienced by BIPOC.** We will be tracking criminal justice legislation that addresses the inequities experienced by black, indigenous, and other BIPOC community members who are disproportionately impacted by our carceral system. One of the bills we are closely tracking is LD179: An Act to Provide Support for Restorative Justice Practices in Maine.

### **Corresponding legislation:**

**LD179: An Act to Provide Support for Restorative Justice Practices in Maine**

**LD178: An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community**

**Last Updated: 03/22/23**