

FALL 2024

HOMELESS VOICES FOR JUSTICE NEWSLETTER



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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 experiencing homelessness and poverty. HVJ is led by organizers who have all experienced homelessness. The founding group in Portland has existed since 1995, and we network in other locations across Maine. Our goal is to build a coalition for, and of, people experiencing homelessness and poverty throughout Maine. We seek to empower people experiencing homelessness and poverty whose perspectives are often excluded from the development of policies and programs that impact their social and economic wellbeing. Disenfranchisement, oppression, and marginalization create this absence. Therefore, we hope to assert ourselves and our interests in Maine politics through protest, education, positive policy change and reform.

When we meet: Every Monday, 9:30-11:30am; contact us for the schedule of locations; 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!





YOU DON'T NEED A HOME TO VOTE

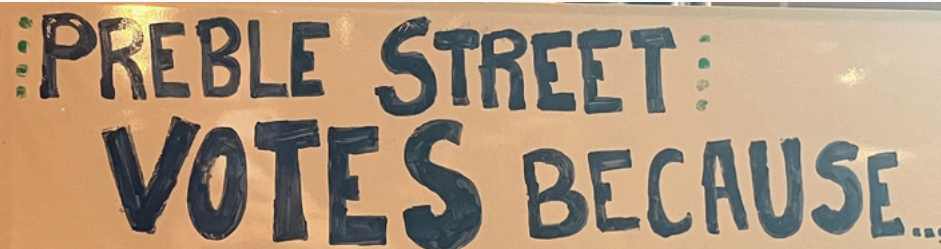
By Ben Martineau

It's that time of year again when any Maine resident who is a US citizen can vote in the state of Maine. Homeless Voices for Justice and Preble Street have a You Don't Need a Home to Vote campaign. We try to register voters throughout the year, but we amp up our efforts once fall comes. HVJ will use different Preble Street programs to register voters and help individuals obtain absentee ballots. The deadline for requesting an absentee ballot is Thursday, October 30th. We help people fill out voter registration cards and educate them on who is running for political office and where their polling place is. We can also drop voter registration cards off at City Hall. The deadline to drop off voter registration cards is October 16th.

Sheltered individuals can use their shelter address, while unsheltered people experiencing homelessness can use write "unsheltered" along with a description of the place they sleep or hang out the most (i.e., unsheltered - corner of Congress St and Elm St).

Folks may also register at the time they vote. If you plan to register on election day, bring a valid picture ID or a piece of postmarked mail with your name and address. Polling places will be open until 8:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 5th, Election Day.

Why vote? Local elections may come down to one vote making a difference. Portland City Council candidate Roberto Rodriguez won by a coin toss because of a tie vote in 2021. Cast your ballot and make a difference this election season!



PREBLE STREET:
VOTES BECAUSE...

CANDIDATES' FORUMS

By Jim Devine

As with every election, Homeless Voices for Justice is hosting several candidates' forums as part of our You Don't Need a Home to Vote efforts.

- The first forum is Tuesday, October 22nd at 10:00 a.m. at Florence House on Valley Street for District 2 City Council. The candidates who indicated that they will attend the forum include Atiim B. Boykin, Nancy English, Catherine Nekoie, Robert O'Brien and Wes Pelletier.
- The second forum is Wednesday, October 23rd at 11:00 a.m. at 55 Portland Street for At-large City Council. The candidates who indicated that they will attend include Jess Falero, Ben Grant, Grayson Lookner, and Brandon Mazer.
- The third forum is Wednesday, October 23rd at 1 p.m. for the District 1 Council in the parking lot of 55 Portland Street. The candidates who indicated that they would be present for the forum include Sarah Michniewicz and Robert Todd Morse.
- The fourth forum for Congressional candidates is Tuesday, October 29th at 10:00 a.m. at the Homeless Services Center. Representative Chellie Pingree and opposing candidate Ron Russell both indicated that they would attend.

As part of this effort, HVJ has sent out nine questions to each candidate to get their views on antipoverty issues. There are a rather large number of candidates to consider, and the responses to the election survey are available on Preble Street's website.

It is our belief that since all policymakers make decisions that affect everyone's lives, it is important for everyone to vote. Although our outreach efforts are geared to getting the homeless community involved, these forums are public events, and everyone is invited.



FOOD SECURITY HUB

By Cher Harkins

Do you ever wonder where your prepared food comes from now that the Resource Center and the kitchen had to close? After COVID, many changes had to happen for people's safety, and through it all, Preble Street has remained committed to the unhoused and determined to keep providing food and assistance. They opened a new kitchen in South Portland. This new site has a large kitchen and professional staff enhanced by volunteers. Sometimes, we don't realize exactly how much work goes into the food preparation and delivery options for Preble Street to be able to feed so many people. There's inside construction to enlarge the kitchen from around 500 square feet to approximately 5,000 square feet. This will allow enough space to make 10,000 meals daily! There's also construction happening to build a loading dock so that trucks will be able to load more easily.

The Clothing Closet has recently moved to the same building in South Portland. Everyone is busy adding to inventory to help keep people warm this winter. All clothing donations are being sent to this facility now. If you need clothes, ask your Case Worker, and they'll help you. October is now here, and we all know it's not going to get any warmer. Please remember that the Homeless Services Center (HSC) on Riverside Street is an option for emergency shelter nightly. Please keep yourself safe.



THE FARM BILL

By Eric Brewer

As I read the story of the Farm Bill, I noticed its scope, breadth, and wide range of coverage—everything from insurance to land conservation to food for low-income families. The latest versions in the House and Senate propose different changes to the bill's support for existing programs.

The Farm Bill traditionally supports commodities in farming, such as sugar, wheat, beans, and dairy, and other farm-related costs, such as insurance. The Farm Bill is reviewed by the government every five years, and this year, the House of Representatives is seeking to slash funding for the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). The cut proposed by the House of Representatives is nearly \$30 billion. Authors of the House bill say that people receiving SNAP will not see a reduction in their benefits. However, benefits will no longer be tied to the Thrifty Food Plan, the annual USDA determination of the cost of nutritious food. Many anticipate that by removing the link to the Thrifty Food Plan, SNAP benefits will have reduced purchasing power, affecting millions of Americans.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the government increased SNAP benefits to \$250 per month or to 15%. Those already receiving SNAP benefits received more than this. COVID was like a mini experiment. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) had a budget of \$112.8 billion during Fiscal Year 2023. 42.1 million people received SNAP benefits at this time. According to Matthew Desmond PhD, a researcher and author from Princeton University, child food insecurity decreased by 46% during the pandemic in the United States due to the increase in SNAP benefits at this time.

The newest proposed budget by the House of Representatives would decrease SNAP benefits, leaving Americans hungry and unable to provide for themselves. What does this mean for Mainers? Maine has the highest rate of food insecurity in New England. If SNAP benefits are cut, food pantries and food hubs across Maine will be stressed beyond their limits. Soup kitchens will see an increase in people accessing meals, and many will simply go hungry! This is an election year, and we should urge officials to vote against SNAP benefit reductions.



SECTION 8 VOUCHER FREEZE

By Mike Stuckmeyer

MaineHousing, along with housing authorities in the communities of Brewer, Portland, and Westbrook, will not be handing out Section 8 housing vouchers for the time being.

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development directed these agencies to stop issuing new vouchers after they went 105% over budget in July 2024.

Here is how the freeze is impacting Maine residents served by these agencies:

1. Those who have been waiting on the waitlist will have to wait longer
2. “People who already have vouchers can still use them”*
3. “No new applications will be approved until the freeze is lifted”*
4. “Unused vouchers can be transferred to new clients”*

We will be updating new information as changes become available.

*Works Cited: Portland Press Herald, “Federal housing voucher program on pause in large swaths of Maine”, <https://www.pressherald.com/2024/08/14/federal-housing-voucher-program-on-pause-in-largest-parts-of-the-state/>



INTERESTED IN JOINING HVJ?
WE MEET EVERY MONDAY FROM 9:30
TO 11:30AM

Contact us for the schedule of locations

All are welcome to attend

(207) 899-6042
hvj@preblestreet.org