



Maine Municipal Association

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To: Sen. Hickman, Rep. Roeder, and distinguished members of Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities

Fr: Commissioner, Rebecca J. Graham, Legislative Advocate, MMA

Re: Collapse of Rental and Emergency Shelter Assistance Program

Date: October 27, 2022

Maine's municipalities are facing an entirely preventable humanitarian crisis that will also impact 121 communities and over 8, 578 households. The sudden closure of the Emergency Rental Assistance and Shelter program is not simply a federal funding issue. In late October, Maine Housing notified administrating agencies that program funding would not likely be available for November. While it now appears funding is likely to be available to carry households through November, when those funds are ultimately exhausted, the need for housing for those families does not disappear. In addition to the long-term focus to date of this Commission, there are tangible recommendations that could be made not only to address this issue, but to make sure that such a crisis does not occur again.

While MMA understands there is an effort to receive additional federal funding to extend the program, if not extended or replaced, those effected individuals will simply face being unhoused during Maine's coldest period should a permanent solution not be found. Any extension needs to include a plan to ensure tenants are prepared for this.

This committee could recommend the extension of the ERA program, but also that any future collapse of that program provide a solid plan for not only communicating to Maine Housing partner organizations but also the tenants themselves.

Many of these families are currently in rental housing or hotels with incomes or rent payments that exceed the established limits on General Assistance maximums. Applying for General Assistance funds is their only option. While some communities have charters that allow a payment over and above that State of Maine established maximum, the vast majority cannot. Those currently housed families will be unhoused by State of Maine policy and lack of response to market forces.

The Commission could recommend that the State limit on all emergency rental assistance caps be raised to match market and salary reality and provide greater General Assistance flexibility. Additionally, the Commission could also suggest the Legislature consider 100% reimbursement for expenditures for these emergency situations while encouraging more landlords to take on GA tenants based on fair rent. Additionally, the Governor could declare a state of emergency on this issue and increase the reimbursement immediately. This is an immediate need that cannot be solved by development.

General Assistance applications must be processed within 24 hours. If an applicant cannot get assistance in this timeframe, they may apply through the Department of Health and Human Services for assistance. However, if an application is submitted to the State instead of the municipality, it is considered a failure of the municipality and they are billed for the administration of the application and required to pay 100% of the assistance with no reimbursement.

When MaineHousing runs out of funds, Bangor, Portland, South Portland, Lewiston, Caribou and Farmington will have 24 hours to process 2,800 possible applications for rental or emergency shelter payments or face penalties and additional fees for a foreseeable problem not of their making. If 2,800 individuals were unhoused at once because of natural disaster, even in only a handful of communities, the state would not charge a penalty or fee to a community to assist with administrative paperwork.

Municipalities have not created this administrative crisis. This Commission should consider either shifting the administrative burden for this program shift back to MaineHousing or removing the municipal reimbursement penalties and administrative fees for individuals who apply through the State of Maine portal.

I am attaching a spreadsheet that provides the number of households currently receiving emergency rental assistance by municipality. I hope this will shed some light onto the impact of unhousing these families in your own communities. For instance, Bangor's 944 households represent 1,598 individuals. If that formula is applied to the rest of this household level data, there are potentially 14,484 individuals —just under the population of the City of Augusta —facing eviction as a result of this crisis.

I feel like this Commission is able to make recommendations to help these families in this incredible moment of need and prevent such a problem from occurring in the future. I hope Commissioners will consider some of the statutory and policy problems highlighted here and consider additional recommendations to address the immediate needs that building alone simply cannot address.

MUNICIPALITY	ERA Households
AUBURN	306
AUGUSTA	150
BANGOR	944
BATH	80
BELFAST	52
BERWICK	16
BIDDEFORD	224
BREWER	172
BRIDGTON	26
BRUNSWICK	77
BUCKSPORT	14
BUXTON	12
CALAIS	17
CAMDEN	29
CAPE ELIZABETH	12
CARIBOU	100
CARMEL	17
CASCO	17
CLINTON	14
CORINNA	18
CORINTH	23
DEXTER	46
DIXFIELD	14
DOVER FOXCROFT	28
EAST MILLINOCKET	15
EASTON	10
EDDINGTON	16
ELLSWORTH	67
FAIRFIELD	54
FALMOUTH	16
FARMINGDALE	10
FARMINGTON	124
FORT FAIRFIELD	47
FORT KENT	54
FREEPORT	81
FRYEBURG	10
GARDINER	23
GLENBURN	24
GORHAM	49
GRAY	19
GREENE	14
GUILFORD	14
HAMPDEN	32
HANCOCK	38
HERMON	19
HODGDON	10

HOLDEN	16
HOULTON	77
JAY	42
KENDUSKEAG	25
KENNEBUNK	18
KITTERY	44
LAGRANGE	18
LEEDS	11
LEVANT	18
LEWISTON	726
LIMESTONE	31
LINCOLN	53
LINCOLNVILLE	19
LISBON	61
LISBON FALLS	22
LIVERMORE FALLS	41
MACHIAS	25
MADAWASKA	43
MADISON	27
MECHANIC FALLS	10
MEXICO	44
MILFORD	33
MILLINOCKET	49
MILO	38
NAPLES	16
NEW GLOUCESTER	11
NEWPORT	47
NORTHPORT	10
NORWAY	45
OAKLAND	21
OLD ORCHARD BEACH	54
OLD TOWN	147
ORONO	105
ORRINGTON	21
OXFORD	19
PALMYRA	19
PITTSFIELD	37
POLAND	17
PORTER	11
PORTLAND	872
PRESQUE ISLE	258
RICHMOND	10
ROCKLAND	92
ROCKPORT	39
RUMFORD	96
SABATTUS	29
SACO	99

SANFORD	197
SCARBOROUGH	160
SKOWHEGAN	112
SOUTH BERWICK	11
SOUTH PARIS	53
SOUTH PORTLAND	410
SPRINGVALE	22
STANDISH	23
THOMASTON	14
TOPSHAM	24
TURNER	11
Unknown	10
VAN BUREN	37
VASSALBORO	13
VEAZIE	19
WALDOBORO	16
WARREN	27
WASHBURN	16
WATERVILLE	191
WELLS	31
WESTBROOK	219
WILTON	69
WINDHAM	56
WINSLOW	40
WINTERPORT	10
WINTHROP	15
YARMOUTH	28
YORK	24