

# HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION PLAN

**ADOPTED BY THE STATEWIDE HOMELESS COUNCIL  
August 8, 2006**

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**This plan was developed by a Homelessness Prevention Task Force whose members included:**

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Shawn Yardley, Statewide Homeless Council & City of Bangor Health & Welfare  
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FOCUS AREA 1: Strengthen the General Assistance system in Maine so that it is a better resource to prevent the homelessness of individuals and families.

**Strategies:**

1. The Maine Municipal Association and the Department of Health & Human Services adopt a General Assistance Protocol for Addressing Complaints. (See Attachment 1)
2. Amend the General Assistance statute to require each municipality to post two new posters outside municipal offices. One poster (Attachment 2) is very simple and explicit about what individuals can do if they've been told they cannot apply for General Assistance. The second poster (Attachment 3) speaks to the requirement for taking an application in an emergency, provides contact information, mentions the local ordinance, etc.
3. Require the General Assistance office within DHHS to develop a proposal for creating a GA data base that would provide municipalities the tools for uniform collection of data across the state (unduplicated number of individuals and households receiving GA, the number of applications received, number of denials, categories of expenditures, etc.)
4. Add two staff to the state General Assistance office to more effectively assist municipalities in administering the program.

**Background Information:** Originally, the DHHS GA staff consisted of a program manager, a supervisor, and four field examiners. By 1998 the staff included a program manager and three field examiners. Today, there are only two field examiners and the program manager.

There are 492 municipalities. Depending on the size of the community, an examiner may spend from a few hours to five days conducting a program audit. The examiners also are responsible for answering the GA hotline and for providing training to individuals on how to administer the GA program.

**Projected Annual Cost: \$125,000 for salary and benefits**

5. Create a task force to examine the current GA funding mechanism and to develop recommendations for future funding by the state and the municipalities.

**FOCUS AREA 2: Increase the supply of affordable housing in Maine so that low-income households are able to find and maintain rental housing.**

**Strategies:**

1. Restore the 45% share of the Real Estate Transfer Tax, as originally enacted, to be directed to the State Home Fund administered by MaineHousing.
2. Develop and pass a broad-based Housing Bond initiative that includes preventing/ending homelessness by including \$20 million targeted for this purpose.
3. Ask MaineHousing to develop investment fund options for Maine residents to invest in the development of truly affordable housing that would provide a reasonable return to the investors.

**FOCUS AREA 3: Ensure that very low-income individuals and families have access to already established programs that can prevent homelessness.**

**Strategies:**

1. Increase access to the Emergency Assistance Program administered by DHHS by making this resource available to adult households without minor children in the home, increasing the current annual limit of assistance from \$600 to \$1,200, and allowing assistance in two separate 30-day periods during a 12-month period. (See Attachment 4)  
**Projected Annual Cost: \$4,162,927 (this includes \$3,762,927 in direct benefits and \$400,000 to add 12 DHHS staff)**
2. Provide for a statewide Representative Payee program administered by DHHS. A Representative Payee is an individual or an organization receiving Social Security and/or SSI payments for individuals who cannot manage or direct the management of their funds. (See Attachment 5)  
**Projected Annual Cost: \$400,000, with \$209,920 to be paid with state funds and the remaining \$190,080 from monthly fees paid by the Social Security Administration for administering this program. This includes the addition of six staff.**
3. Provide for a statewide Social Security Income and Disability Insurance Program administered by DHHS. This program, conducted in conjunction with homeless shelters and GA offices, would assist homeless individuals in applying for SSI/SSDI benefits and following through with the process (filing paperwork, obtaining medical records, filing appeals, arranging appointments with attorneys, etc.). (See Attachment 5)  
**Projected Annual Cost: \$190,000 for three Disability Specialist positions with each working with an average of 100 consumers per year.**

## **FOCUS AREA 4: Reduce the number of low-income tenants who are evicted from apartments each year.**

### **Strategies:**

1. Encourage local General Assistance offices to educate landlords about the state law relative to tenants occupying rooming houses or single-room-occupancy units. Also, encourage Maine cities to adopt local ordinances that match the state law regulating single-room-occupancy housing or rooming houses to ensure that residents have the usual protections afforded tenants.
2. Extend to all tenants who receive a Notice to Quit based on nonpayment of rent the option of paying the rent to resolve the issue. Prevent landlords from eliminating this right, already afforded to tenants-at-will, by the way a lease is written.
3. Provide in Maine law for the inclusion in all Eviction Notices of the tenant's right to go to court. Each Eviction Notice also would have the following language:  
    “You may have a right to legal assistance (list Pine Tree number).”  
    “You may have a right to financial assistance with your rent through General Assistance and/or the DHHS Emergency Assistance Program.”
4. Expand a current pilot program in southern Maine that advocates on behalf of people who are facing eviction to a Statewide Homeless Advocacy Program that will prevent homelessness by: A) providing legal representation for low-income tenants in eviction cases in up to eight courts around the state, B) providing legal representation for a homeless adult to access General Assistance and other services that will support family stability, and C) educating the public and local advocates on state law and local ordinances concerning housing issues and tenant/landlord relations.

**Projected Annual Cost: \$200,535 (to be raised privately without requesting state General Fund dollars)**