

Advocacy Report: May 2017

The Preble Street FAN: Faith Advocacy Network

Co-organized the first ever Maine Interfaith Advocacy Days in Augusta on March 27th & 28th collaboratively with the Maine Council of Churches and the Maine Episcopal Network for Justice. One hundred and fifty people of faith convened for training and legislative action at the State House. Preble Street facilitated workshops on hunger and homelessness. People of faith talked with electeds about key pieces of legislation that will reduce hunger and homelessness in Maine.

Homeless Voices for Justice

Convened their annual day at the State House on Thursday, April 20th. In preparation, HVJ collected over 80 stories from people living in poverty about how further cuts to the safety net will impact them. They have published the stories in a special edition Homeless Voices for Justice News Letter. Here are some examples:

- ▶ I would go hungry if these cuts went through. I would basically feel helpless. I get food stamps. Without food stamps, I'd be in a lot of trouble.
- ▶ There are not enough programs as it is! To cut more funding for homeless people will cause nothing but future mass homelessness!
- ▶ Even WITH a job, I have to rely on SNAP to feed myself. Almost all my income goes toward rent.
- ▶ My parents are very hard workers who are struggling to get by and if I lost food stamps I wouldn't be able to afford to live independently anymore. It would be a terrible burden. And I would lose my opportunities to become more self-sufficient. We need to invest in the struggling lower class so they can become independent and contribute again.
- ▶ It's hard enough to get ourselves out of the hole homelessness creates, but this cut will only create more homelessness and poverty.
- ▶ If it wasn't for GA, I'd be homeless again. GA has basically helped me get off the streets. A lot of people depend on this service. If you cut GA out you'll be creating crisis situations for people. Please don't stop GA funding.
- ▶ I am from Gabon, a little West African country led by a dictator who has no regard for human rights. I was forced to leave my country to save my life. I came to Portland where the General Assistance was vital for me since I had no means to sustain myself. Cutting the entire GA program would be disastrous for asylum seekers like myself. We need it! Don't cut!

Legislative Campaigns

LD 970: An Act to End Homelessness by Expanding Housing Support Services -

Representative Erik Jorgensen (D Portland) has introduced legislation to address homelessness in Maine by establishing Housing First as a state-funded program. The bill provides funding for 24-hour consumer choice housing support services to tenants at site-based Housing First developments for chronically homeless individuals in an area or areas of the state where such need is greatest.

Public Hearing: held on March 27th in the Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development Committee. We organized strong testimony from 22 organizations and individuals from around the state. We even got a letter from the Lieutenant Governor in Utah that was a big hit. Here are some short excerpts:

► I hope our state can build more sites like Logan Place. I want to see everybody off the streets. I'm happy I don't have to sleep outside anymore, but there are still lots of people out there trying to survive in the cold. The homelessness problem keeps getting worse and it needs to stop. At Logan Place, I keep my apartment clean to give the staff the same respect that they have given to me. If I need something, the staff at Logan Place will bend over backwards to help me. This is the best place I have ever lived in. I couldn't ask for better people than the staff that is there; they are wonderful. If someone offered me a million dollars for my apartment, I wouldn't accept it. This is my place. This is my home. – Patrick Market, Logan Place Tenant

► I have been in the advertising business since founding my agency in the early 90's, working with some of the best brands in the world, like Samsung, Unilever, and Disney. The Holy Grail for these companies is to uncover the "Big Idea". Big ideas change the game in business because they positively impact all stakeholders. I have witnessed that the housing first model is a Big Idea, a huge idea really, for it benefits all members of our community in astounding ways. First, it makes tremendous economic sense. The cost of keeping people in homelessness is dramatically higher than when we can help the homeless people establish safe and stable housing. Having a home allows people the normality and foundation to then begin addressing their health and development needs – which is a much more efficient and cost-effective way of serving this community. Anytime we can provide better services at a lower cost, everyone should be thrilled. – John Coleman, Housing First volunteer and Founder of the VIA Agency

Work Session: held on April 3rd in committee. The bill was tabled and then rescheduled for May 9th when it was voted out of committee with a strong 10-3 majority Ought To Pass vote. The bill will now move to the floor of the House and Senate then on to the Appropriations Table.

LD 1538 An Act to Support Veterans Who Participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Representative Scott Hamann (D South Portland) has introduced legislation that will exempt Veterans from the SNAP 3-month time limit.

Public Hearing: held on May 8th in the Health and Human Services Committee. We organized strong testimony from Veterans.

▶ I was dropped from SNAP because of the time limit. I'll turn 50 soon, but what do I eat between now and then? I served my country and I've worked my whole life in physical labor including construction and working on machines. – Timothy Keefe, U.S. Navy Veteran

▶ We are losing 22 Veterans a day to suicide nationwide. We need to understand why. Many of our Veterans have lost the support from their families because the families don't know how to help their Veteran. We need to be supportive of these warriors by not limiting the services they need. – James Bachelder, Maine VFW Homeless Veterans Committee Chairman

Work Session: will be held on Monday May 15th.

LD 809 An Act to Address Student Hunger with a Breakfast after the Bell Program - Senator Joyce Maker (R Calais) has introduced legislation that requires high need schools to offer breakfast after the bell (breakfast in the classroom, a grab 'n' go cart, or a second chance breakfast).

Public Hearing: held on March 22nd in the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. We organized strong testimony from 23 stakeholders around the state. Here are some excerpts:

▶ Many students come to school hungry. Last year, I noticed that despite the high rates of hunger and poverty in our area, the number of students eating breakfast at school was very low. I started looking for ways to get breakfast to more kids. – Sue Carter, Principal at Calais Elementary

▶ Sometimes I have to make hard decisions about buying groceries, and providing other basic needs for Vanessa and I. At Vanessa's school in Saco, they serve Breakfast in the Classroom. Having breakfast provided for Vanessa after the school is a huge help. Even though I work full-time, balancing our budget can be a challenge. - Sonja LeClerc, Parent in Saco

▶ How do I get more kids to have breakfast? My solution: let's feed all the kids Breakfast in the Classroom. Did more students get breakfast? Yes, a 350% increase in breakfast participation and a \$55,000 increase in federal subsidy are the astounding figures in my book! - Louise Dean, Food Service Director in Caribou

Work Session: held on April 7th. Bill voted out of committee with a strong 11-2 Ought To Pass majority report.

LD 816 An Act to Promote Academic Achievement through Hunger Relief for Maine Children - Senator Cathy Breen (D Falmouth) has introduced a bill to eliminate the reduced price category for school meals in Maine and therefore serve lunch to all students who are eligible for free and reduced price meals at no cost to the student.

Public Hearing: held on March 22nd (right after LD 809) with strong testimony from 7 food service directors and child advocacy organizations.

► I know that these families have a very difficult time paying that \$.40 per lunch per day which amounts to \$2/week. They simply don't have the money to spare. I see children bringing less healthy foods from home and missing out on our lunches that are designed to provide one-third of recommended daily nutritional needs for the student. Nutrition is part of the foundation for the achievement of academic success. – Mary Emerson, Food Service Director in Hiram

Work Session: held on April 7th. Bill voted out of committee 12-1 Ought To Pass (also a very strong bipartisan majority report).

LD 1113 An Act to Improve Anti-Hunger Programs in Maine Schools - Senator Shenna Bellows (D Manchester) has introduced legislation to create a statewide online free and reduced price school meal application.

Public Hearing: On April 3rd. We organized strong testimony from 8 food service directors, a parent, advocacy organizations, a doctor, and nurses.

► My son's school uses a paper application for the free and reduced meal program. Not many 3rd graders can be held accountable to bring or return these forms when they are sent home... We need to make sure that hungry kids are getting the nutrition they need at school, and if a form that is very easy to lose is a barrier towards kids eating, we need to remove that barrier. – Brianna Nielsen, Parent in Portland

► As school nurses we see hunger; be it through a student's physical appearance or the physical symptoms of hunger such as; nausea, headaches, dizziness, fainting, irritability, agitation and fatigue. A question we often ask our students as they find our way into our offices is; "Have you eaten? Did you have breakfast? Did you have lunch? I do not have the statistics to tell you the exact percentage of the time the answer is "NO, I have not," but it happens far too often. – MaryBeth Bachman, School Nurse in Falmouth

Work Session: On April 28th. Bill voted out of committee 12-1 Ought to Pass.

LD 1475 An Act to Reduce Child Poverty by Leveraging Investments in Families Today – Speaker of the House Sara Gideon has introduced a bill to reduce child poverty with multiple strategies including housing vouchers, work supports, a transportation initiative, a TANF benefit increase for families with low-income.

Public Hearing: was held on Monday May 8th with huge turnout. Preble Street testified along with dozens of others. Contact Maine Equal Justice Partners for more information.