

Given existing Federal constraints, the Administration has worked in partnership with many municipalities, MaineHousing, the Legislature, and Maine's Congressional Delegation over the past four years to support Maine towns and cities with helping asylum seekers transition into Maine's communities and workforce.

The Administration has enacted changes to the rules governing General Assistance to ensure the program serves people intended to receive assistance under the law as we chart a more sustainable path forward for the program, and the Governor joined Maine's Congressional Delegation to fight for reimbursement for the City of Portland from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Since then, our involvement has evolved to account for not only the immediate needs of asylum seekers, but supporting their safety, security, and success over the long-term by delivering funding to frontline organizations and coordinating across government and with partners.

For housing support, these efforts include:

Emergency Housing to provide immediate shelter to those who arrive in Maine:

- Three new shelters in Portland, with a total of about 120 beds, that will continue to serve asylum seeking individuals and families through next winter;
- Hotel rooms that served dozens more asylum-seeking households unable to access emergency shelters;
- \$5.2 million in financing to support a new 180-bed shelter in Portland, that will provide both shelter and services for asylum-seeking individuals and families and create space at the City's Homeless Resource Center to serve those currently living in outdoor encampments. This shelter is expected to open in November.

Transitional Housing to provide longer-term housing, paired with high-quality and comprehensive services, to assist asylum-seeking households with the transition to their new lives in Maine:

- Since the summer of 2022, using state funds authorized by the Legislature, the Asylum Seeker Transitional Housing Program in Saco has successfully assisted over 125 families -- a total of 462 people, 212 adults and 250 children -- with housing and daily services provided by Catholic Charities of Maine, including cultural orientation, transportation, school enrollment, and connections with health care providers and adult education classes. The City of Portland has had exclusive access to the hotel for placements as a way to provide as much relief to the City as possible and to take pressure off their General Assistance department. A portion of the \$12 million for emergency housing which was included in the recently approved biennial budget will be used to continue this initiative through the end of 2024.
- A portion of the \$12 million for emergency housing will also be used for a transitional housing program at the Howard Johnson hotel in South Portland through June 2024. This program will support about 250 people, including more than 100 children, with housing and workforce support services modeled after the Asylum Seeker Transitional Housing Program in Saco.
- Transitional housing has been made available in Portland for 15 pregnant and/or new mothers experiencing homelessness. Comprehensive health services are being provided by

Northern Light Health, and the John T. Gorman Foundation is funding In Her Presence to provide 24-hour staffing, case management services and wide-ranging supports, designed to give women the stable and nurturing environment clinically proven to improve birth outcomes. While the first residents of this program are women seeking asylum with their families, because they represent the vast majority of pregnant women currently experiencing homelessness locally, this site will continue to provide supportive housing to vulnerable populations for at least 45 years under the direction of Community Housing of Maine.

Permanent Housing for more than 250 families, or more than 800 people, to realize the safety and stability of a permanent home:

- In coordination with MaineHousing and local housing developers, making about 125 apartments in Greater Portland accessible to asylum seeking households. Specifically, funds allocated through the FY23 supplemental budget are being used to pay for up to two years of rent at housing units located in South Portland, Portland, and Brunswick. Within that two-year period, these households are expected to receive the supports and guidance they need to settle and enter the workforce, thus gaining the means to pay for their own housing costs before their rent supports expire. The first individuals engaged in this initiative moved into their new apartments in March 2023.
- In coordination with MaineHousing, Prosperity Maine, Quality Housing Coalition and Immigrant Resource Center of Maine, providing the rent supplements necessary for an additional 125 asylum seeking households in the Greater Portland and Lewiston/Auburn areas to remain in their homes and avoid eviction. These rent supports began in March 2023, and partner organizations in this initiative are actively working with families to ensure that they have fully navigated the work authorization process and are able to support themselves through gainful employment by the time this assistance expires.

For legal support, these efforts include:

Legal support to help those seeking asylum navigate the work authorization process and to successfully apply and receive work authorization as soon as possible, so that they can more quickly provide for themselves and their families, reduce pressure on public assistance programs, and help local employers and economies by joining the workforce. This includes:

- \$1,000,000 to the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project over three years to increase their outreach by 300 percent and provide more asylum-seeking households with consultations and information sessions to help them understand their immigration cases and how to apply for asylum.
- \$100,000 to Hope Acts over two years to allow them to continue the highly successful Asylum Application Assistance Program, held two days per week at the Portland Public Library, which offers assistance to about 100 asylum-seeking households each month.
- \$100,000 to Maine Immigrant & Refugee Services to provide asylum application and work authorization assistance to dozens of households in Brunswick.
- \$276,000 from the Maine Department of Labor to Hope Acts to continue and expand its work authorization clinic over the next two years. This initiative is leveraging federal

funding through the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan to support the clinic operations, including staffing, interpreter resources and needed supplies. Through this partnership, the clinic intends to support 1,000 work authorization applications over the next two years. Additionally, MDOL is deploying staff from the Portland CareerCenter to provide on-site career counseling services at the clinic, to help facilitate connections to jobs and training opportunities.

For education support, these efforts include:

Funding support, resources and technical assistance through the Maine Department of Education, including:

- Ensuring students have access to McKinney-Vento homelessness resources and to ensure multilingual students get a quality education.
- Providing eligible SAUs more than \$2 million in Homeless Children and Youth (HCY) funds from the American Rescue Plan during the pandemic.
- Contracting with multiple community-based organizations with the American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth State Set-Aside, including Preble Street and Gateway Community Services, to offer additional support to both schools and to multilingual students experiencing homelessness.
- Providing an additional \$7.1 million this year in federal emergency relief funds to SAUs based on multilingual and homeless student enrollment to provide additional services and support to those student populations. The Department is looking at providing another round of funding based on additional needs and enrollment changes.
- Ensuring that SAUs know they may also be eligible for a special education budgetary hardship adjustment or a minimum economically hardship adjustment, based on the needs of these students. These funds would be calculated based on enrollment through the school funding process.
- Providing \$3.2 million in grants through the Governor's Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan to support workforce skills and development and English language acquisition programs at adult education centers across the state

For services support, these efforts include:

Funding to address a growing need to assist homeless individuals with coordination of services and cultural brokering to help asylum seekers, including:

- The FY23 supplemental budget included \$750,000 for case management services to people experiencing homelessness in four regions of the state, including asylum seeking households. Funding allows case managers to help individuals access a range of critical services including housing and mental health services. The Administration is focused on contracting with community-based organizations that have provided community care services to homeless populations throughout the pandemic. Case management services include cultural brokers when necessary.
- Bi-weekly meetings among the Department of Health and Human Services, the City of Portland, and other nonprofit agencies to assist the City, as well as agencies who are

working directly with the homeless population in the Portland and greater Portland area. MaineHousing is included in these meetings and works collaboratively with the Department to help the City and other agencies navigate situations involving asylum seekers and other people experiencing homelessness.

- The Department of Health and Human Services has also provided more than \$15 million to 16 immigrant-led community-based organizations to provide public health, case management, and social service supports in their communities, including to asylum-seekers. It is using its U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention health disparities grant to continue this support in the short-term.
- The Legislature with support from the Governor funded MaineCare or Medicaid coverage for children and pregnant people who would be eligible but for immigration status effective July 1, 2022.