

STATE OF MAINE

—
IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-ONE

—
H.P. 961 - L.D. 1305

Resolve, To Increase Collaboration between the Maine State Housing Authority and the Department of Health and Human Services

Preamble. **Whereas**, over 19,000 Maine households with extremely low incomes are severely rent burdened, meaning they pay more than 50% of their income toward rent, because they lack access to either the income or rental assistance to afford rent; and

Whereas, due to the number of households struggling to make housing payments, over 5,000 households face eviction every year in the District Court; and

Whereas, the Maine State Housing Authority engages, directly or through grantees, with thousands of households every year who need assistance with rent, utilities or supportive services to find and keep housing and prevent homelessness; and

Whereas, there are over 350,000 families receiving direct financial assistance, food assistance or medical insurance assistance from the Department of Health and Human Services, through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the MaineCare program and other related programs; and

Whereas, the Department of Health and Human Services engages with families on a regular basis to determine eligibility for these assistance programs through the department's office for family independence and also interacts with numerous other families through the Office of Child and Family Services; and

Whereas, coordination between the Maine State Housing Authority and the Department of Health and Human Services will help meet the needs of families for supports with housing and income in a more simplified and holistic manner; and

Whereas, the Maine State Housing Authority is currently administering an emergency rental assistance program through community action agencies for which a person is automatically eligible if the person receives benefits through any assistance programs administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, which provides an opportunity for simplified verification; now, therefore, be it

Sec. 1. Collaboration between Maine State Housing Authority and Department of Health and Human Services. Resolved: That the Maine State

Housing Authority, referred to in this resolve as "the authority," shall collaborate with the Department of Health and Human Services, referred to in this resolve as "the department," to seek, identify and implement initiatives to maximize access to housing assistance for recipients of services from the department and maximize access to assistance programs administered by the department for recipients of housing assistance, including students, from the authority or its grantees. Specifically, the authority and the department shall:

1. Consider mechanisms, including direct telephone outreach, program staff training, mailings, website links and telephone queue recordings, that provide opportunities to increase enrollment in housing assistance programs among department clients and increase enrollment in department assistance programs among housing assistance recipients;

2. Evaluate the extent of increased enrollment in programs administered by the department or the authority that can be reasonably attributed to increased coordination pursuant to this resolve;

3. Consider the capacity of the department's and the authority's computer systems to work together in a manner that most effectively facilitates access to additional services for recipients of services provided by the department or the authority, including the potential for applicants applying for assistance from the department to use the same portal to apply for rental assistance, with applicant information sent to the authority to process and finalize, using preverified data from the department, as appropriate;

4. Identify barriers to collaboration between the department and the authority and possible solutions and resources, financial or otherwise, necessary to overcome these barriers and implement the identified solutions; and

5. Identify any costs, including but not limited to personnel costs and those associated with technology changes, considered necessary to substantially improve coordination between the department and the authority.

Sec. 2. Report. Resolved: That the department shall submit a report, including any recommended legislation, to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services and to the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing no later than January 15, 2022 describing how the department and the authority have worked together to maximize access to housing and income assistance, including the ways in which the technology currently used and designed by the department and the authority can work together to facilitate access, and plans and recommendations for future coordination between the department and the authority. The joint standing committees may submit legislation related to the report to the Second Regular Session of the 130th Legislature.