

PLEASE NOTE: Legislative Information **cannot** perform research, provide legal advice, or interpret Maine law. For legal assistance, please contact a qualified attorney.

An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Maine Affordable Housing Working Group

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 30-A MRSA §4753, sub-§3 is enacted to read:

3. Universal application and waiting list. The Maine State Housing Authority and municipal housing authorities shall establish a single, streamlined application for tenant-based rental assistance under the United States Housing Act of 1937, Public Law 412, Section 8 by which families may apply for housing assistance in any geographic area of the State and shall also establish a statewide, centralized waiting list for that tenant-based rental assistance. The Maine State Housing Authority and municipal housing authorities shall establish a method for individuals or families to submit applications and to update applications for rental assistance by electronic means.

The Maine State Housing Authority and the Department of Health and Human Services shall ensure that an application submitted pursuant to this subsection may also be used by individuals and families to apply for the Bridging Rental Assistance Program established in Title 34-B, section 3011 and a federal shelter plus care program authorized by the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Public Law 100-77 (1987) as amended by the federal Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009, Public Law 111-22, Division B (2009).

Sec. 2. Examination of options to increase access to affordable housing for families with incomes at or below 30% of the area median income. To the extent funds become available, the Maine State Housing Authority shall examine strategies to increase access to affordable housing for persons with incomes at or below 30% of the area median income, including, but not limited to, increasing the accessibility of new housing units built with support from the federal low-income housing tax credit program for households with incomes at or below 30% of the area median income.

The Maine State Housing Authority shall provide a report on its progress in increasing access to affordable housing pursuant to this section to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over labor, commerce, research and economic development matters by January 15, 2019.

Sec. 3. Rental assistance pilot program. The Maine State Housing Authority shall work with municipal housing authorities to identify unused vouchers under the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development's Housing Choice Voucher Program and use these vouchers to establish a rental assistance pilot program. The Maine State Housing Authority shall design and implement the program based on best practices and evidence-based research to provide a comprehensive approach to prevent homelessness and promote housing stability, family well-being and self-sufficiency for families at risk of homelessness.

The Maine State Housing Authority shall collect and maintain data sufficient to evaluate the extent to which the pilot program achieves success in meeting its goals and provide a report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over labor, commerce, research and economic development matters by January 15, 2019.

SUMMARY

This bill, which contains the recommendations of the working group convened pursuant to Public Law 2015, chapter 267, Part QQQQ to evaluate the lack of access to affordable housing, is reported out by the Joint Standing Committee on Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development pursuant to that law. The bill directs the Maine State Housing Authority and municipal housing authorities to create a single, statewide application and waiting list for so-called Section 8 housing and to ensure that the application can be filled out online. The bill directs the Maine State Housing Authority and the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that the application can be used by individuals and families to apply for the federal Shelter Plus Care program and the state Bridging Rental Assistance Program. The bill further directs the Maine State Housing Authority to examine options to increase access to affordable housing for families with incomes at or below 30% of the area median income and to establish a rental assistance pilot program.

The Joint Standing Committee on Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development has not taken a position on the substance of this bill and by reporting this bill out the committee is not suggesting and does not intend to suggest that it agrees or disagrees with any aspect of this bill. The committee is reporting the bill out for the sole purpose of turning the working group's recommendations into a printed bill that can be referred to the committee for an appropriate public hearing and subsequent processing in the normal course. The committee is taking this action to ensure clarity and transparency in the legislative review of the working group's recommendations.