



# MAINE AFFORDABLE HOUSING COALITION

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 Apartments for People LLC, Belfast  
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 Bangor Area Homeless Shelter  
 Bangor Housing  
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 Bath Savings Institution  
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 The Park Banforth, Portland  
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 Through These Doors, Portland  
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 Western Maine Community Action, E. Wilton  
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 Zachau Construction, Freeport

Testimony of Greg Payne

On behalf of the Maine Affordable Housing Coalition

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor & Housing

In Support of LD 1464: *An Act To Improve Accessibility of Affordable Housing Data*

April 26, 2021

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Greg Payne. I am the Director of the Maine Affordable Housing Coalition (MAHC).

MAHC is a diverse coalition of more than 135 private and public sector organizations including developers, architects, engineers, builders, investors, community action programs, public housing authorities, housing and service providers, advocates, and others working to advance solutions that create and preserve affordable housing in Maine.

MAHC supports LD 1464 because it seeks data and information that is critical to the process of addressing Maine's housing problems.

The first section of the bill aims to obtain critical data that no one has right now and which would help us improve success rates in the federal housing choice voucher program. This committee has heard a lot this session about how important housing vouchers are, but you have also heard about the struggles that many voucher holders have in leasing up an apartment once they finally get a voucher. Stakeholders talk about how discrimination against voucher holders is a significant barrier to success, but in reality no one has any idea how widespread that problem is. Likewise, some stakeholders broadly reference tight housing markets as the primary problem – but never with anything close to statewide data backing up that assertion. Are the barriers in Presque Isle and Old Town the same barriers as exist in Westbrook or Bath? Would a modest increase in the maximum payment standard solve the problem for a significant number of households?

The reality is that we don't know the answers to these questions, because we simply don't ask them of people after they are forced to turn their voucher back in and have to tragically walk away from this critical program.

For legislators interested in someday creating a state housing voucher program, finding out why some Mainers struggle to use existing programs would seem to make sense. Perhaps a good first step would be bringing practitioners and stakeholders together to talk through the most effective way of getting this information and providing it to you as policy makers.

The second part of LD 1464 seeks data that could be used to address a problem that thousands of Maine households have been struggling with: efficient processing of rent relief applications. MaineHousing provides helpful data about the rent relief program on its website (see attached), but that data does not speak to how long applications are taking to process in various parts of the state or, perhaps more importantly, *why* some applications are taking so long to process.

Those who have applied for emergency rent help and are nervous about their landlord's patience would likely appreciate knowing how long the typical application is taking to process and the reason for significant delays, to be able to more effectively communicate with their landlords.

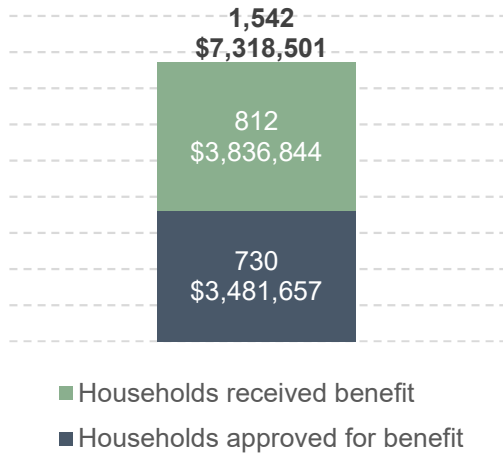
Such information would likely also be useful to those of you as legislators who may be fielding concerns about rent relief from your constituents – tenants and landlords alike.

The rent relief program is an enormous undertaking and has proven to be a challenge for governments and community groups across the country. We see this bill not as a criticism of those who are working hard to administer the program here in Maine but as a common-sense way of providing more and better information to tenants, landlords and policymakers about where the problem points are, so that they can be more quickly addressed.

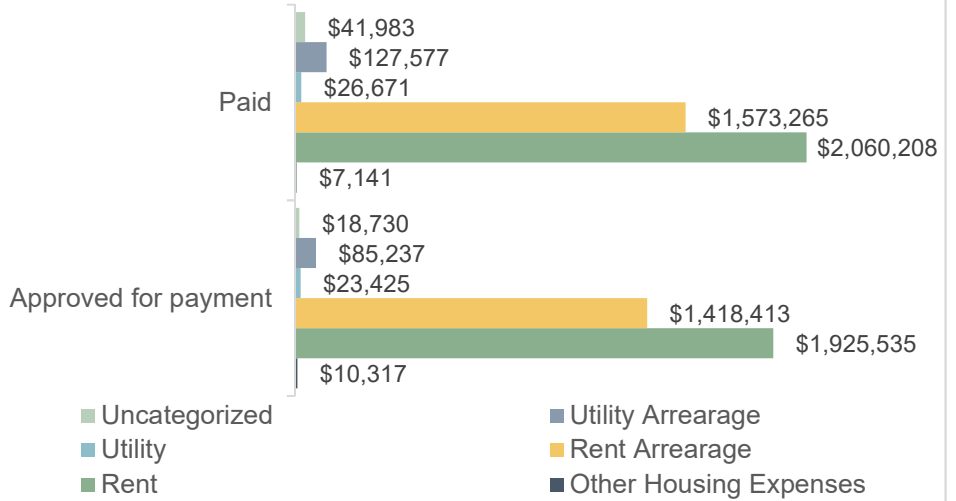
In sum, we believe that the data sought in LD 1464 would be highly valuable in improving key programs that some of our state's most vulnerable renters now rely on to ensure their housing stability. We urge your support and are grateful to Speaker Fecteau for his continued leadership on these issues.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

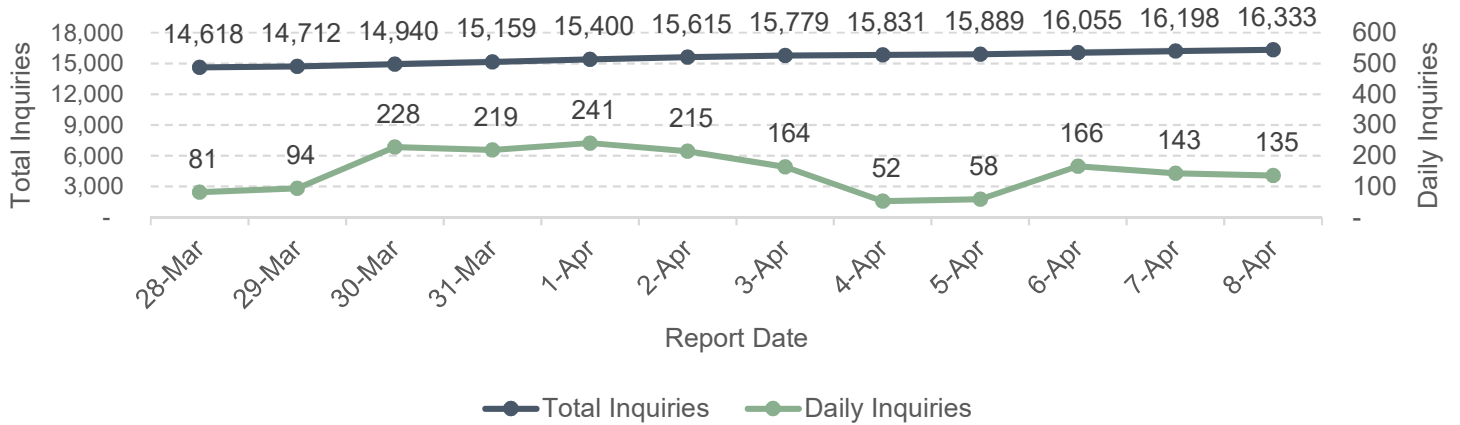
### Households approved for and received benefit



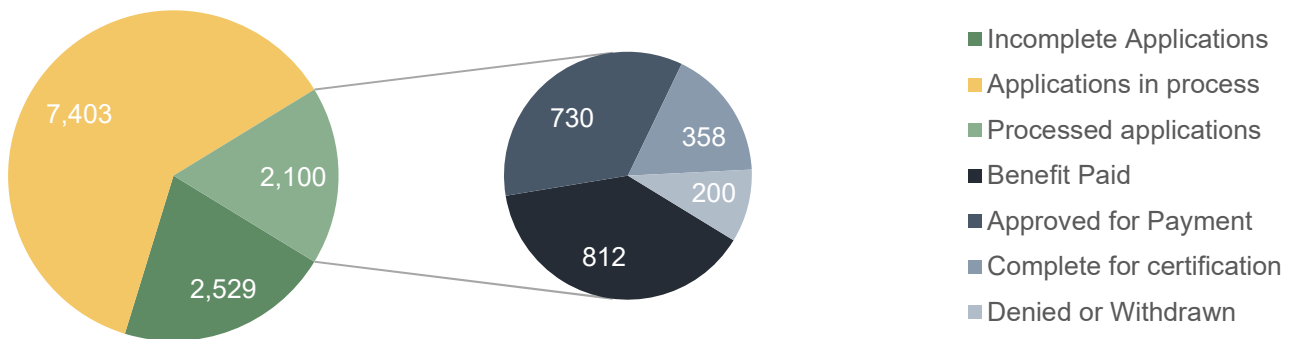
### ERA Expenditures



### Total & Daily Inquiries

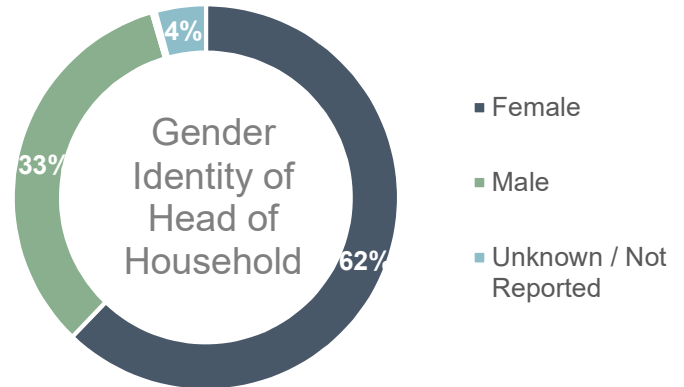
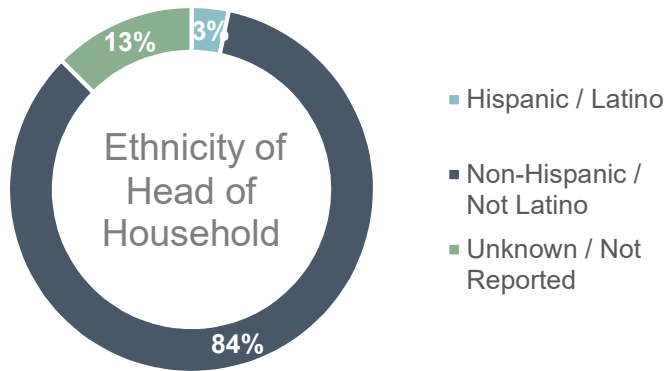


### ERA Application Status

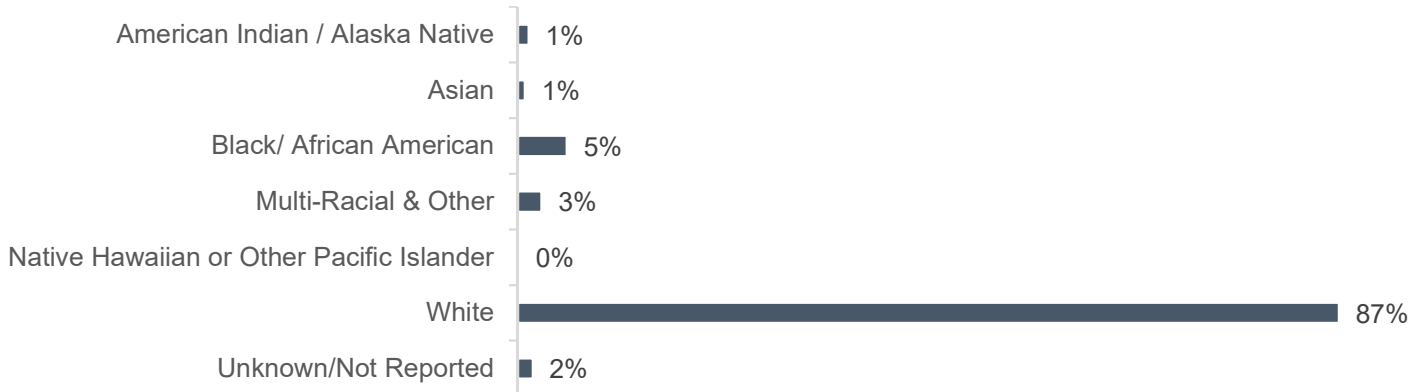


## Household Demographics

Number of Youth (<18) in Households	Number of Older Adults (≥55) in Households	Average Household Size	Average Area Median Income (AMI) %
1,524	298	2.4	36.7



### Race of Primary Applicant



### About MaineHousing

MaineHousing is an independent quasi-state agency and a top mortgage lender and affordable housing lender in the state. It is a \$1.8 billion financial institution with a staff of 160+ whose mission is to assist Maine people in obtaining and maintaining affordable housing and services suitable to their housing needs.

On an annual basis the agency helps more than 90,000 Maine households and invests more than \$300 million in Maine's economy, most of it from the sale of tax-exempt revenue bonds, private capital generated by the low income housing tax credit, and federal funds.

For more information about MaineHousing programs, please contact us at:

Maine State Housing Authority  
 26 Edison Drive | Augusta, Maine 04330-4633  
 207-626-4600 | 800-452-4668 | Maine Relay 711 | Fax 207-626-4678  
 mainehousing.org



**Data is inclusive of the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, March 1, 2021 - Present.**