Mainely Landlords

For landlords with tenants who have Housing Choice Vouchers from MaineHousing

Winter 2015

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Call to landlords! We need more accessible units to meet demand

The Homeward Bound Program is administered by Maine’s Department of Health and Human Services-Office of Aging and Disability Services (OMDS) to assist in the transition of clients from nursing homes to private housing.

The program is federally funded by a grant under “Money Follows the Person.” Clients work with a variety of service providers to determine the needs of the client and options available.

To aid in this effort, MaineHousing has set aside a small number of Housing Choice Vouchers available for those clients who are unable to return to their family’s home, a subsidized apartment, or make other living arrangements.

The tenants participating in Homeward Bound have a variety of disabilities and finding an accessible unit for tenants with mobility impairments has been a challenge in all areas of Maine.

The Homeward Bound Program has a limited pool of funds to pay for modifications necessary to allow the tenant full use of the unit.

If you have a unit that is accessible or on the first floor and that needs minor modifications, please contact Maureen Brown at 207-626-4695 or mbrown@mainehousing.org.

We have several participants searching for housing now. Thank you for helping more than 10 of our participants secure safe, affordable and accessible housing.

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Find it online

MaineHousing places all Mainely Landlords newsletters on its website. Beginning with this issue, we’re starting something new!

In some of these articles, you’ll see purple text. That is a link to a report, brochure, program, or page that’s posted online. To get to it, open the newsletter on our website, click on the link, and be brought directly to the page. This helps us serve you with additional information you may need.

Go to www.mainehousing.org, select “partners”, and then “property owners and managers.” Newsletters are in the bottom right hand corner.

Guest Column

Fire safety is a responsibility we all share

By Joseph Thomas, State Fire Marshal, and Patricia Murtagh, CEO of the American Red Cross in Maine

There are few sounds more concerning than the siren of a fire truck, rushing to the scene of yet another blaze. We hold our breath and hope the damage is minimal and that everyone escaped safely.

Since September 1, our state has seen at least 14 fire-related deaths, a staggering number. Fires in Biddeford, Portland, Caribou, and elsewhere in Maine cut short young, promising lives, leaving family, friends, and the community shocked, numb, and searching for answers.

The following are summary results by each interviewed focus group. These are based on comments provided by individual members of the focus groups and do not necessarily represent the opinions of MaineHousing or the organizations the participants represent.

**Today’s Rental Market**

The rental housing market is tight for single family and multifamily units. Units that become available are filled quickly. There are more difficulties keeping renters in single family units due to the fact that they pay utilities. Although renting is becoming less affordable, units still get filled. It appears that renters do prefer to move to newly built low income housing developments, although there are too few of them to meet need. There is a high need for more units for seniors although needs for all segments — older, move ups and baby boomers — are significant. Today’s renter is looking to have the electricity or other utilities paid, and in some instances they require parking spaces.

**Issues and Concerns**

Affordability of rents is the major issue for landlords followed by tenants’ behavior and problems making deposits. Finding qualified renters and state regulations and inspections for properties are also concerns. Regulations on tie-downs for mobile homes are troublesome. Because mobile homes are easy, efficient, single floor, and can provide a good method to house people. The tie-down issue is cost prohibitive. The production of new multifamily housing is

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Owners applying for Owner Excellence Program distinction

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MaineHousing’s new Owner Excellence Program (OEP) is creating a buzz among property owners and managers wanting to be recognized and rewarded for their exceptional property management skills and high level of dedication to their tenants and properties.

In late January, MaineHousing mailed an invitation to apply to more than 250 owners who had a lease with an active tenant in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program for the past 12 months and had not had any abatement in their housing assistance payments (HAP).

Director John Gallagher told owners the invitation was the first step. Interested owners were asked to fill out an application for the annual program, which then would be reviewed by MaineHousing. Accepted owners then are notified and will be recognized at a later date. A ceremony is being planned for this June in Augusta.

MaineHousing has received more than 20 applications representing more than 70 properties!

Along with having an active tenant and no abatements, OEP-selected property owners follow Maine laws regarding security deposits; list their units on MaineHousingSearch.org; are registered in the process of registering for MaineHousing’s Direct Deposit Program and Partner Portal; are in good standing with utilities (for landlord-provided utilities); and have no tenant complaints regarding utilities.

The selected property owners do not owe MaineHousing any outstanding money. They have no history of abatements; no serious complaints on file with MaineHousing in the last 12 months; no history of failure to enforce the lease or follow the HAP; no history of pending foreclosures for any HCV Program unit; and no liens or back-owes taxes on any HCV Program unit.

The benefits of this program are great! If selected, the owners receive participation in the Security Deposit Program, a seal to place on their MaineHousingSearch.org advertisements; exclusive inspection scheduling; are allowed to self-certify minor fails on their units; receive paid membership fee to their local landlord association; and other benefits.

Incentive Programs are “pilot” programs offering incentive to landlords, security deposit for tenants

The Security Deposit Plus and Low Poverty Incentive Programs are “pilot” programs now offered by MaineHousing. They are, however, subject to available funds and favorable outcomes.

Low Poverty Incentive

Studies indicate that policies allowing some low-income people to move to better quality neighborhoods through vouchers or some other kind of affordable housing assistance offer greater opportunities for low-income families and their children. Some of the benefits are better school systems, lower crime rates, and access to medical care. “There also is potential for better jobs and overall well-being.”

MaineHousing will pay the new landlord a one-time $100 incentive fee to encourage leasing in those areas. Tenants must be moving from a high-poverty area to a low-poverty area in order to qualify.

Go to www.mainehousing.org for the list of low poverty area towns in MaineHousing’s jurisdiction or call us at MaineHousing and we will be glad to assist you.

Security Deposit Plus Program

On a limited basis, MaineHousing will be offering the Security Deposit Plus Program to new participants. Tenants can work with the landlord to “build” a security deposit for future use. Tenants must have at least $250 to pay toward the security deposit and the landlord must be willing to accept MaineHousing’s guarantee of the remaining security deposit— up to $500.

If a tenant moves after the first year of the lease but before the next 12 months (move-in months 12-24) we will verify that the tenant does not owe any money to the landlord and as a bonus to the tenant, we will send the new landlord a $500 security deposit for the new unit.

However, if the tenant moves before the lease expires and up to 24 months after lease up, we will reimburse the landlord up to $500 for materials needed to make the repairs. The landlord must provide documentation that there are damages to the unit beyond normal wear and tear.

Fire safety is a responsibility we all share

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office and local fire departments on a nationwide initiative that aims to reduce fire-related deaths and injuries by 25 percent over the next 5 years.

To succeed, this effort requires the support and participation of all Mainers, including local fire departments, business owners, community leaders — and the readers of this paper.

What can everyday people do? First, make sure you have working smoke alarms. Simply put, smoke alarms save lives. Your odds of surviving a fire increase 50 percent if you have a working smoke alarm. We recently responded to a fire that could have been extinguished by an alarm in the building, but there were no deaths or injuries. While it’s too early to determine the role smoke alarms played in that outcome, we were pleased to hear several of them sounding as firefighters extinguished the blaze.

Too often, we learn of missing or disabled alarms at scenes of fatal fires. Alarms should be installed on each floor, outside of each bedroom. It’s important to test your alarms monthly and vacuum them regularly, to keep them free of dust. You may only have a few minutes escape time if a fire breaks out. So please, take a few minutes to check and install smoke alarms and practice an escape plan.

This is particularly critical in cold weather. The most common types of fires are cooking- and heating-related, so this is an especially important time to take extra precautions.

Most of us will never experience a home fire. But if the unexpected happens, you may only have minutes to react. So please, take a few minutes to check and install smoke alarms and practice an escape plan.

Landlords talk issues during MaineHousing focus group

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too costly to be affordable or profitable for those who develop them, and they can crowd out others providing the bulk of housing to citizens in need. MaineHousing needs to increase the amount of vouchers and the value of those vouchers. Incomes are not keeping pace with costs landlords face in keeping properties operating. Rules requiring landlords to allow pets are extreme and as a result, people who do not really need the pets have them, they make a mess and the landlord must deal with it. Pets should be allowed in rental properties but you need to limit it and eliminate the no change rule. It’s costing landlords.

MaineHousing and Landlords

MaineHousing can help by increasing the value of vouchers, making them more available, and by providing more consistency in inspections program. What passed for years will not pass now. It should allow the private sector to provide housing instead of building new units that are inherently more costly and end up not really helping people who need affordable housing. MaineHousing should work harder to review regulations that are unreasonable or provide financial assistance to landlords to help them comply. Market studies should better reflect actual vacancy rates in communities where housing is being developed.
Smoke Alarms at Home

Smoke alarms are a key part of a home fire escape plan. When there is a fire, smoke spreads fast. Working smoke alarms give you early warning so you can get outside quickly.

Safety Tips
- Install smoke alarms inside and outside each bedroom and sleeping area. Install alarms on every level of the home. Install alarms in the basement.
- Large homes may need extra smoke alarms.
- It is best to use interconnected smoke alarms. When one smoke alarm sounds they all sound.
- Test all smoke alarms at least once a month. Press the test button to be sure the alarm is working.
- There are two kinds of alarms. Ionization smoke alarms are quicker to warn about flaming fires. Photoelectric alarms are quicker to warn about smoldering fires. It is best to use both types of alarms in the home.
- A smoke alarm should be on the ceiling or high on a wall. Keep smoke alarms away from the kitchen to reduce false alarms. They should be at least 10 feet (3 meters) from the stove.
- People who are hard-of-hearing or deaf can use special alarms. These alarms have strobe lights and bed shakers.
- Replace all smoke alarms when they are 10 years old.

Facts
- Smoke alarms should be installed inside every bedroom, outside each sleeping area and on every level. Smoke alarms should be connected so when one sounds, they all sound. Most homes do not have this level of protection.
- Roughly 2 out of 3 fire deaths happen in homes with no smoke alarms or the alarms are not working.
Carbon monoxide (CO) is a gas. It has no odor. CO gas is poisonous. It can make a person feel sick and can be deadly. In the home, heating and cooking devices that burn fuel can be sources of carbon monoxide.

**CO ALARMS**

- CO alarms should be installed outside each sleeping area. Install alarms on every level of the home. It is best to use interconnected alarms. When one sounds, all CO alarms in the home sound.
- Follow the instructions on the package to properly install the CO alarm.
- Test CO alarms at least once a month.
- Replace CO alarms according to the instructions on the package.
- Know the sounds the CO alarm makes. It will sound if CO is detected. It will make a different sound if the battery is low or if it is time to get a new CO alarm.
- If the battery is low, replace it.
- If the CO alarm sounds, you must get fresh air. Move outdoors, by an open window or near an open door. Make sure everyone in the home gets to fresh air. Call the fire department from a fresh air location. Stay there until help arrives.

**PREVENT CO POISONING**

- When warming a vehicle, move it out of the garage. Do not run a fueled engine indoors, even if garage doors are open. Make sure the exhaust pipe of a running vehicle is not blocked. Clear snow away.
- During and after a snowstorm, make sure vents for the dryer, furnace, stove and fireplace are clear of snow build-up.
- Clear all debris from dryer, furnace, stove, and fireplace vents.
- A generator should be used outdoors. Use in a well-ventilated location away from windows, doors, and vent openings.
- Gas or charcoal grills can produce CO. Only use them outside.
- Have heating equipment and chimneys inspected by a professional every year before cold weather sets in.
- Open the damper when using a fireplace for adequate ventilation.
- Never use your oven or stove to heat your home.

**FACT!**

CO is called the silent killer because the gas cannot been seen or smelled. Take action to stay safe from CO poisoning.