

Mainely Landlords

Two property owners join Owner Excellence Program

MaineHousing welcomes two new property owners to the Owner Excellence Program: Harry McKenna with 4 units in Rumford, Mexico, and Dixfield, and Laurel Lane with 2 units in Madison.

For more information on the Owner Excellence Program, contact HCV Inspections Manager Barbara Brann at bbrann@mainehousing.org or (207) 624-5725.

New inspector joins team

Maureen AuCoin-Giroux has joined MaineHousing as an HCV inspector. She has a background in code enforcement and property assessment. Welcome!

Your rental property is an investment. Don't let it go up in smoke.



For help implementing a smoke-free policy for your rentals, contact the Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine at (207) 874-8774 or info@smokefreeforme.org



Save money and lives by adopting a smoke-free policy. It's a win-win for you AND your tenants. www.smokefreeforme.org

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Housing: First rung on the ladder to a better way of life

For families to access economic opportunities, housing matters. Housing assistance allows households to have a stable home base, cover their basic needs, and save for the future. In order to receive a Housing Choice Voucher (HCV), participants must meet income eligibility at less than 50% of area median income.

Many of MaineHousing's voucher holders have experienced homelessness and most have dealt with the issues that accompany living in poverty, such as food insecurity, health issues, frequent moves, and the inability to cover the cost of their basic needs. Some have disabilities that prevent them from working, but many are employed. National research studies have found that households with a housing voucher do not use that voucher as a substitution for work. After having a voucher for five years, families have somewhat higher work hours than their unsubsidized peers.



Lauren Bustard
HCV Program Director

For our voucher holders whose long-term goal is full-time employment at a living wage, MaineHousing's HCV program offers a program called ReStart (HUD's Family Self-Sufficiency Program). ReStart

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A two-story apartment building in Norway owned by Peter Marcinuk was destroyed by fire in October. Tenants got out safely.

One Landlord's Story

'Thankful no one was hurt'

By Deborah Turcotte
Public Information Manager

That high-pitched noise squealing through the chilly October night air would not stop. The constant buzzing and blaring of one long-held note lasted for more than one-and-a-half hours.

But nobody minded.

Landlord Peter Marcinuk, owner of Northeast Rental Housing, stood outside his burning four-unit Norway apartment building that night hearing that otherwise nerve-grating sound as he tried to keep a mental checklist of

questions as they popped up and eventually were answered. Were his tenants out of the building? Did they have guests over? Were they out?

Is anyone hurt? Is everyone safe?

The noise finally stopped. But if there is such a thing as music to one's ears, this sound's presence was it.

"The smoke detectors were going off throughout the blaze until they melted," he said, with a gasping sigh of relief.

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HCV Director: ReStart could help your tenants find success

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is a five-year program that assists participants to set and achieve financial, educational and employment goals, while at the same time depositing funds into an escrow account as the participants' earned income increases and their rent portion increases. At successful completion of the program, participants receive the funds that have accrued over time in their escrow accounts.

Many successful graduates have increased their earnings to the point where they no longer require rental assistance and are able to give up their voucher so that we can assist someone on our waiting list. We are actively working to grow this program and invite landlords to visit our ReStart webpage at www.mainehousing.org/restart so that you in turn can encourage any HCV tenants you have to learn more about the program.

Expanding housing choice options in low poverty areas – landlord incentives

MaineHousing and HUD also believe that greater opportunities may be available for education, employment, and services for tenants who live in low poverty areas of the state.



To demonstrate our commitment to assisting our participants in moving out of poverty, we will be offering an incentive to landlords that lease rental units to voucher holders in the following towns: Eliot, Gray, Hollis, Kittery, New Gloucester, North Yarmouth, Pownal, Sebago, South Berwick, Standish, and York.

These towns were selected because they are located in the HUD-established Metropolitan Statistical Areas in MaineHousing's jurisdiction and have a poverty level of under 8%.

For a limited time, MaineHousing will pay a higher security deposit (up to \$1,000) for tenants leasing a new unit in these areas. We will be offering the incentive to tenants who are moving and will send you the form to complete when the HAP contract is signed.

We appreciate all our landlords already do for our voucher holders and want to thank you for your part in our efforts to help them achieve the economic independence that will enable them to pay their own housing expenses while at the same time providing for all the other basic needs of their families.

POVERTY IN MAINE

- Maine is the 12th hungriest state in the country.
- One in 6 households struggles to put food on the table.
- More than 172,620 live in poverty (under \$20,160 annually for a family of 3) or 13.4%.
- The estimated living wage for a family of 3 in Maine is \$55,890 annually.
- 1 in 5 children lives in poverty.
- 1 in 7 women lives in poverty.
- People of color in Maine are almost 3 times more likely to live in poverty than white people.
- 42,972 are employed but still living in poverty.
- 49.1% of households have at least one wage earner but still need SNAP (food stamps) to live.
- There are 65 affordable units available for every 100 renter households with very low income.

Landlord's guilty verdict puts others on alert about window sizes

A Portland landlord's recent manslaughter trial is putting landlords on alert regarding life safety codes.

On Nov. 29, landlord Gregory Nisbet was sentenced to 90 days in jail and fined \$1,000 for violating a safety code because his building's third-floor windows were too small to be used as an exit during the November 1, 2014 fire which killed six people. He was found innocent of six counts of manslaughter.

Nisbet is seeking a new trial.

The state's minimum size rules for windows are the same as what MaineHousing requires for its Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program, as listed in our HCV Administrative Plan.

Any building constructed after 1976 is required to have windows that provide at least 5.7 square feet of net clear opening with a minimum width of 20" and a minimum height of 24". This shall be measured with the window in its natural open position. The window should meet

NFPA 101 Life Safety Code requirements for egress windows. Replacement windows must meet the requirements.

Any building constructed before 1976 must have windows, including replacements, where the net clear opening meets the minimum 20" in width and 24" in height with a total net clear opening of 3.3 square feet if the window is constructed of wood or vinyl. The overall window sash size must meet a minimum of 5.0 square feet. NFPA 101 Life Safety Codes apply.

One Landlord's Story

'Thankful no one was hurt'

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Too often news reports of apartment or house fires include the words, "the smoke detectors were not working." Not in this case.

"We were thankful that no one was hurt in the building," he said. "A cat died, but people were safe. They were kept safe because we comply with life-safety codes."

Like the majority of buildings in Maine, the Norway apartment building was old -- about a hundred years old. Building and life-safety codes that are in place now were not written a century ago. Today, landlords participating in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program are required to adhere to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Housing Quality Standards (HQS) and MaineHousing's additional requirements, which in several instances are stricter than HUD's. Landlords, also, agree to move-in and annual inspections of their units.

The extensive list covers egress and windows, carbon monoxide and smoke detectors, corridors, sanitation facilities, electrical, lead paint, plus many other items.

While most landlords, including Marcinuk, consider the requirements a blueprint on how to maintain safe living environments, there are others who consider them to be onerous or view them as government overreach.

"These are public funds and we respect that," he said. "We want to use them responsibly and that responsibility flows to public safety."

The standards also help fill the information void that exists in many of Maine's towns that have small fire departments or do not have code enforcement offices. Marcinuk said Maine

is one of a handful of states that does not have a landlord certification program, something he believes would be useful. He's also a strong proponent of being a member of a landlord association because of the benefits that come with it, including discussions of codes and enforcement.

Marcinuk and his family own more than 200 apartment units; about two-thirds of them are market-rate, and the others are under the Section 8 program. He said he applies the HQS and MaineHousing standards in all of his units, not just Section 8.

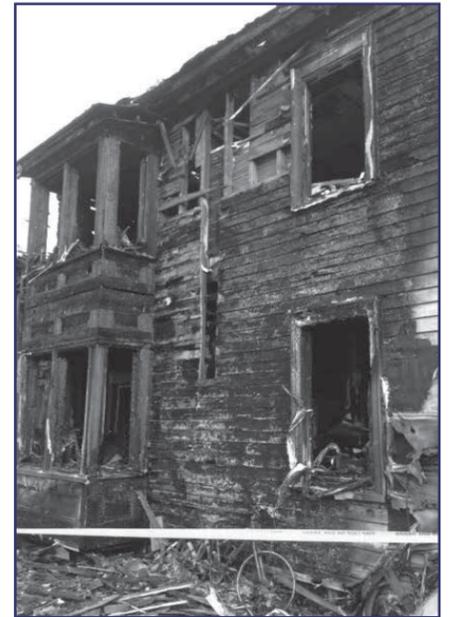
"My kids and I say, 'if it wasn't for Maine State Housing, how would we know how to keep people safe,'" Marcinuk said. "We defend Maine State Housing to a lot of people who may not see the value of renting through Section 8."

For the Norway building to be part of the Section 8 program, he had to make some structural changes. More importantly, he replaced second floor windows that were improperly sized to meet second-floor egress standards.

Marcinuk acknowledges that fires are random in nature, and unfortunately people may die in them. With one week left in the year, 20 people have died in fires in 2016, according to the state Fire Marshall's Office.

On a recent mid-December day, Marcinuk was out taping notices to his tenants' apartment buildings, reminding them that they could not smoke inside the buildings or that they needed to shut their windows. As he traveled among his properties, he said it was his responsibility to be an active and engaged landlord, not only to maintain his properties but to protect his tenants' lives.

He admits, though, that like many other landlords he worries about tenants blocking egress with boxes or furniture or



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batteries being taken out of smoke or CO detectors. Some tenants' units require additional inspections through the year. "If we feel there are those that warrant an additional inspection, say at six months, we do that," he said.

Since the Norway fire last October, Marcinuk has been more vigilant. He's implementing an emergency action plan for each of his buildings. It will include the names and contact information of tenants, a central location to meet in the event of a fire, and other details. "It's not required, but it's something that would make the process of an emergency less stressful for all involved."

Also, he's asking his tenants to purchase renters insurance and let him know that they have it. He knows that it can cost around \$120 a year, and many can't afford it. So, in exchange, he'll reduce either the security deposit or the monthly rent.

To Marcinuk, it's all about safety.

"I sleep well at night knowing we're doing the best we can," he said. "We rely on what Maine State Housing tells us, and we use it on all of our units. We make sure we do things as correct as we can."