



## Press Release

For immediate release

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### **100% of Maine Housing Authorities Adopt No-Smoking Policies**

*Maine becomes first State in nation to protect tenants from secondhand smoke*

On January 1, 2012, tenants who live in Maine public housing authorities will be protected from the dangers of secondhand smoke. Each of the 20 public housing authorities across Maine has now adopted a smoke-free policy. Though 250 public housing authorities throughout the Nation have passed policies, Maine is the first State in the Nation to have all of its public housing authorities achieve this level of protection for their residents.

The Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine is a unique public-private partnership that has been working with public housing authorities and property owners throughout Maine since 2004. "We know that in Maine over 75% of tenants surveyed want to live in smoke-free housing. Our goal is to have the supply of smoke-free housing meet that demand," says Tina Pettingill, a founder of the Coalition which receives support from the Partnership For A Tobacco-Free Maine at the Maine CDC.

The state housing authority, MaineHousing, agrees. MaineHousing has been a supporter of the smoke-free concept since the beginning of the Coalition's efforts. Executive Director Dale McCormick states, "Encouraging and supporting our public housing authorities and subsidized housing to adopt smoke-free housing policies has made perfect sense for us. MaineHousing's mission is to assist people in obtaining safe and affordable housing, and we recognize that a building which contains tobacco smoke is not safe for the residents who live there."

The dangers of secondhand smoke have been gaining attention over the past 10 years. The most recent U.S. Surgeon General's report published in 2010 stated unequivocally that, "The debate is over, the science is clear; there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke." The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) heard this message and responded with two memos strongly encouraging all HUD funded and subsidized properties to pass smoke-free policies. These memos have impacted property owners and managers in Maine, and throughout the nation. Rick Whiting, Executive Director of the Auburn Housing Authority, stands behind HUD's endorsement, stating, "When a policy

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presents us with the opportunity to protect our tenants from toxins that travel between units, it actually saves us money, and HUD supports it—well, it just makes good sense to adopt it.”

Research from several housing authorities in Maine demonstrate the cost savings cited by Whiting. “Property owners can save between \$500 and \$5,000 per unit at turnover,” Pettingill explains. “Allowing smoking in a building damages and can ruin carpets, laminates, walls, appliances, and furniture; where smoking is allowed, there is potential for costly damages to a property. The expenses associated with making these necessary repairs are prohibitive for most property owners and remedied by simply barring smoking in the building.”

The Partnership for a Tobacco-Free Maine (PTM) is the State’s tobacco prevention and control program at Maine CDC, DHHS. The PTM emphasizes that smoke-free housing policies are not about displacing renters or asking people to quit smoking.

Years of research demonstrates that secondhand smoke travels between units, and the only way to protect people from involuntary exposure is to prohibit smoking inside the building.

“These policies are about requiring people who smoke to go outside of the building where the smoke cannot harm others,” said Dr. Sheila Pinette, Director of the Maine CDC. Dr. Pinette noted that while smoke-free housing policies do tend to serve as a motivator for people to consider quitting, that is not the basis for the initiative. “This is about protecting the child with asthma, the elderly person with emphysema and the people living in multi-unit buildings who are being involuntarily exposed to secondhand smoke.”

All twenty of Maine’s public housing authorities have adopted smoke-free policies. They include Auburn Housing Authority; Bangor Housing Authority; Bar Harbor Housing Authority; Bath Housing Authority; Brewer Housing Authority; Brunswick Housing Authority; Ellsworth Housing Authority; Fort Fairfield Housing Authority; Lewiston Housing Authority; Mount Desert Island Housing Authority; Old Town Housing Authority; Portland Housing Authority; Presque Isle Housing Authority; Sanford Housing Authority; South Portland Housing Authority; Southwest Harbor Housing Authority; Tremont Housing Authority; Van Buren Housing Authority; Waterville Housing Authority; and Westbrook Housing Authority.

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*Maine CDC's tobacco prevention and control program. The coalition is comprised of over 50 public health advocates, tenants, landlords, property managers, legal professionals, environmental health professionals and many others working since 2004 to protect Maine residents in multi-unit housing from involuntary exposure to secondhand smoke. The Coalition provides free technical assistance and tools for adopting, implementing and enforcing smoke-free policies in multi-unit properties throughout Maine. To learn more, please visit us at [www.smokefreeforme.org](http://www.smokefreeforme.org) or contact the Smoke-Free Housing Coalition at (207)874-8774 or [info@smokefreeforme.org](mailto:info@smokefreeforme.org).*