



Equity Legislative Priorities for 2022

Policymakers Must Act to Advance Equity in Maine

In the spring of 2020, organizations and individuals came together to reimagine *systems* and *policies* in light of COVID-19 and the inequities it has laid bare. Many of us contributed our expertise, insights, and perspectives to build a [Vision for an Equitable Maine](#).

Sixty-one organizations support this vision and are working together to help Maine get there. Our vision spans agendas and constituencies to look holistically at the changes that will move us toward an equitable Maine.

We can come together to help people **regain lost ground** and build a **more resilient future** where everyone has the chance to reach their full potential. While policymakers passed laws in 2021 that will make some [significant progress to advance our vision](#), there is still important work to be done. This year, we urge policymakers to act to address inequities in tribal sovereignty, housing, health care, and to improve the state's ability to target and shrink inequities into the future.

EQUITY means recognizing the inherent rights of indigenous tribes in Maine to self-govern and ensuring they enjoy the same rights, privileges, and immunities as other federally-recognized tribes across the country. Passing **LD 1626 is about fairness**. For the last 40 years, the state government and courts have used language in the 1980 Settlement Act to treat the Wabanaki tribes as little more than municipalities and as less than the other 570 federally recognized tribes in the U.S.. The Wabanaki tribes must have this legal standing to fully embrace opportunities for economic development, to increase access to health care, respond to natural disasters, and expand environmental protections.

EQUITY means that every Maine resident has a safe and affordable home. We must address the housing crisis in Maine and support legislation that makes meaningful progress on access to affordable homes in every community. We are facing a housing crisis that stems, in large part, from the challenges of building enough safe and affordable homes for Maine people. Zoning is often used to prevent the development of new housing. In 2021, the Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions explored opportunities to increase access to housing in Maine by reforming zoning and land use laws. Legislation to advance these recommendations would lay a foundation for more affordable housing. Together with other policy changes to address the lack of affordable housing, improvements to zoning policy will lay a foundation for every community in Maine to welcome housing affordability and diversity.

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As Maine rebuilds from the pandemic, our "new normal" should be more equitable.

EQUITY means that every Maine resident is able to access the health care they need when they need it. Health care coverage must be universal—no one should be excluded due to their immigration status. The pandemic made clear that our collective safety and our economic recovery are tied to each person's ability to get the healthcare they need. In 2021, the Legislature passed a state budget that included MaineCare coverage for people under 21 and pregnant people regardless of immigration status. This was a meaningful step forward, but many adults are still barred from coverage. Lawmakers must act to close the coverage gap to ensure that every Mainer has access to the health care they need when they need it.

EQUITY means that we advance equitable policies by enhancing the State's ability to collect, analyze and apply data. **LD 1610 will ensure Maine has smarter data and analysis capabilities to support equitable policies, public access, and engagement.** This bill was introduced by House Assistant Majority Leader Rachel Talbot Ross as a companion to LD 2 to strengthen the state's capacity to collect, analyze, and publish data for higher-quality racial impact statements and for better-informed policy making. We must take the steps needed to improve policymakers' ability to target and shrink inequities in our laws and policies.