

Statement from Robyn Merrill, Maine Equal Justice executive director, on the release of 2019 poverty and hardship data for Maine by the Census Bureau:

“2019 poverty and hardship data for Maine released today by the Census Bureau show that Mainers were already facing hardships, and more recent data reflect an even harsher reality. While the 2019 data show a slight reduction in official poverty rates in the state ([10.9%](#) of Mainers experiencing poverty in 2019, compared to [11.6%](#) for 2018), we are in a completely different world now. More recent data reflect our reality: Mainers are suffering from a pandemic and a recession that show no signs of abating soon, and the need for relief from Washington is urgent.

When the \$600 federal unemployment benefits ended, many more Mainers had to apply for other programs to make ends meet.



As a country, we've allowed inequality to grow for generations. Now we are all paying the price. Even in 2019, the stage was set for the Coronavirus to push people from housing insecurity to homelessness, from poor nutrition to hunger, and from worrying about affording a doctor's visit to dying from COVID because of existing health problems. When enhanced federal unemployment benefits ended at the end of July, applications for food assistance in Maine increased by [40%](#) in the first week of August. Applications for cash assistance through TANF [tripled](#). Since the beginning of

August, MaineHousing has received [three](#) times the number of rental relief applications than were filed in July, and in August, [42%](#) of Mainers reported they were likely to be evicted or foreclosed upon in the next two months. The need in Maine is great and growing, and we need our leaders in Washington to respond.

The Senate's refusal to negotiate or vote on a bill that is comprehensive enough to meet the needs of Mainers is reprehensible and out of touch with the experiences of everyday people. There is no substitute for real action, and no forgiveness for those who fail to act when the need is so great. We need Senate Republicans to put politics aside and pass a strong relief package that includes a 15% increase to food assistance, extending Pandemic-EBT through the whole school year, more federal funding for Medicaid, rent relief and further eviction protections, and an extension to Pandemic Unemployment Benefits to get Mainers through this crisis.”