



PRESS STATEMENT

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State-wide Coalition Responds to HUD and Obama Administration for Protecting Low-Income and Vulnerable Tenants

Maine has already taken steps to ensure protections exist but more work remains

Yesterday, U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Julián Castro joined Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy to announce a proposed rule to make the nation's public housing properties entirely smoke-free. By reducing the public health risks associated with tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke, the proposed smoke-free rule will enhance the effectiveness of HUD's efforts to provide increased public health protection for residents of public housing. Maine landlords and tenants are ahead of this curve but more work remains to fully protect tenants from involuntary exposure to secondhand smoke.

"Secondhand smoke knows no boundaries. It travels under doors, through electrical outlets, pipe chasing, etc., and there is no ventilation system in existence which prevents that invasion from one unit to another," comments Sarah Mayberry of the Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine. "In Maine, each of our 20 public housing authorities has already taken the steps necessary to protect tenants from the deadly toxins in secondhand smoke."

"Auburn Housing Authority has had a smoke-free policy in place for 11 years. This was a tough decision at the time but turned out to be one of the best decisions we've ever made because it protects all of our tenants and employees from secondhand smoke, maintains the integrity of our buildings, and costs us less in turnover. A smoke-free policy fits our core mission of providing safe and affordable housing," says Rick Whiting, Executive Director.

The dangers of secondhand smoke have been gaining attention over the past 10 years. The 2010 U.S. Surgeon General's report stated unequivocally that, "The debate is over, the science is clear; there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke." Smoke-free housing policies in Maine are now the norm rather than the exception. In addition to Maine's public housing authorities adopting policies, recent Maine data demonstrate that 65% of all private multi-unit housing properties have chosen to go smoke-free and tenants prefer smoke-free buildings at a rate of 77%. "These data show us that there is more work to be done to protect all tenants



from involuntary exposure to secondhand smoke. We still have children with asthma, and elderly with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and other chronic conditions living in apartment units where smoking is allowed inside. Our coalition works with landlords who want to save money on maintenance and turnover, reduce their risk of fire, and protect their tenants from the dangers of secondhand smoke,” reports Mayberry.

Each of Maine’s twenty public housing authorities have voluntarily 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.

The Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine is a non-profit coalition supported by the federal grant from the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that funds the Partnership for a Tobacco-Free Maine, the Maine CDC’s Tobacco Prevention and Control Program and is housed in the City of Portland’s Public Health Division. The coalition is comprised of over 50 public health advocates, tenants, landlords, property managers, legal professionals, environmental health professionals, and many others working since 2003 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 or contact the Smoke-Free Housing Coalition at (207) 874-8774 or breatheeasy@portlandmaine.gov.