

Redesigning Infrastructure to Address the Needs of Women and Families

Infrastructure is essentially those services and structures that are so integrally important to a community's well-being and ability to function, that the community takes on the primary responsibility of establishing and operating them. Roads and bridges, water and sewer, schools and sidewalks have long been part of our understanding of essential infrastructure. Yet there are a host of infrastructure needs that have a direct impact on women's ability to achieve economic security, but that are seldom fully acknowledged as community or public infrastructure responsibilities. These include child and elder care, housing and transportation.

Ensuring that children and the elderly receive quality care that is affordable for individual families is critical for women to successfully balance their multiple roles as students, workers, community leaders, and caregivers. Similarly, affordable housing is becoming a rare commodity, and is desperately needed by an increasing proportion of Maine families, particularly households headed by women, which have lower incomes overall. Communities suffer when home ownership rates fall, or when workers cannot afford to live in communities in which they work. Transportation in Maine is a challenge for virtually every community, rural and urban. But reliable, affordable transportation is essential to economic vitality, in that it is the means by which workers get to their jobs, get their children to childcare, and shop for the family's needs.

In order for women and families to achieve economic security, it is essential that there be public investment in the creation and operation of these services and facilities.

The Issues

- Accessible Public and Reliable Personal Transportation
- Affordable Housing
- Quality and Affordable Child Care
- Quality and Affordable Elder Care

Priority Recommendations

Transportation

Access to affordable, reliable public and private transportation

- Expand Maine's Wheels to Work program to:
 - Make vehicle purchase assistance programs available to families earning up to 200% of poverty level, with a progressively larger subsidy / loan for those with the lowest incomes
 - Support vehicle purchase options that will facilitate ridesharing, including added subsidies for those who commit to using their vehicle for regular ridesharing
 - Provide low-interest loans to assist low-income individuals to obtain driver education needed to obtain a driver's license

- Establish incentives for employers to create transportation assistance programs for employees, including people with a disability that prevents them from driving
- Allow local communities to use federal transportation dollars for operating costs of public transportation systems.
- Make the Jobs Access program a permanent, allotted source of money that goes to every state every year.

Education and training systems that fully address transportation issues

- Require high schools and adult education programs to include information on auto purchasing and leasing as part of their consumer education curricula.
- Ensure that federal and state social service and employment programs include transportation issues when assisting participants with career and life planning. Provide training for case managers, counselors and other direct service workers to ensure that they have the necessary information to address transportation barriers for all populations so that everyone's transportation needs are being addressed, including people with a disability that prevents them from driving.

Equal opportunity for women in employment and contracting

- Maintain the federal On-the-Job Training Supportive Services (OJT/SS) program, which is designed to increase the effectiveness of approved OJT programs, particularly in providing effective training opportunities for minorities and women. These funds have been invaluable in assisting Maine women to enter highway construction careers.
- Maintain the federal Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program provisions that ensure equal opportunity in transportation contracting markets, address the effects of discrimination in transportation contracting, and promote increased participation in Federally funded contracts by small, socially and economically disadvantaged businesses, including women- and minority-owned enterprises.

Incentives for family / community-friendly design of new developments

- Establish incentives for developers to build housing where public transportation already exists.
- Promote improved coordination among transportation planning and implementation agencies, human service and community development agencies (including public housing agencies, welfare agencies, workforce development agencies, senior service organizations, disability service organizations, and others).
- Enforce existing requirements that public housing applications include a transportation plan.

Housing

Community Planning

- Enact smart growth legislation that reduces sprawl and contributes to the creation of supportive neighborhoods.

- Ensure that local planning processes place a strong emphasis on the creation of supportive neighborhoods that include affordable housing, good school systems, parks and open space, and child care.

Affordable Housing

- Promote deeper rental and homeownership subsidies so that households with the lowest incomes and highest needs are not required to pay more than 40% of their income for housing related expenses.
- Expand the property tax circuit breaker program so fixed and low-income homeowners can afford to remain in their homes in the face of rising property tax rates.

Assisted Living

- Ensure the development of assisted living facilities that are affordable for low- to moderate-income elderly and disabled women. Ensure that these facilities provide supportive services that allow women to be as independent as possible.

Quality and Affordable Child Care

Quality and Affordable Elder Care