



MAINE AFFORDABLE HOUSING COALITION

Newly Released Data Indicates Communities of Color Bearing a Disproportionate Burden of Eviction Activity in Maine; MAHC Calls on Legislature to Act Now to Prevent Evictions as Moratorium Expires Later This Month

Eviction is often a highly traumatic and consequential event, especially for low-income families. Despite the wide-ranging impacts that evictions have on individuals, families, and communities, Maine has historically lacked accessible details about the thousands of eviction cases filed across the state each year. Responding to this lack of critically important data, the Maine Affordable Housing Coalition (MAHC) recently launched an Eviction Tracking Database, which now contains information from approximately 2,300 eviction cases that were filed in Maine's busiest eviction courts between July of 2019 and December 2020.

Having gained a [better understanding](#) of the prevalence, causes, and outcomes of eviction filings in Maine, MAHC has begun to overlay its eviction database with data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. The purpose of this geospatial analysis is to better understand the demographic, economic, health, and housing characteristics of the neighborhoods in which evictions are most prevalent.

One key takeaway that has emerged from [similar analyses across the country](#) is that eviction filings are disproportionately affecting neighborhoods with higher numbers of renters who are people of color.

Based on MAHC's preliminary analysis, this unfortunate trend appears to hold true in parts of Maine as well.¹ MAHC examined three areas of the state with some of Maine's most diverse populations: Androscoggin County, the tri-city area of Portland/South Portland/Westbrook and the two-city area of Saco/Biddeford, and found the following²:

Androscoggin County:

The most racially diverse census tracts in Androscoggin County were home to 45% of the county's renter households, but 57% of the eviction filings.

¹ It is important to note that eviction files do not include the race of the defendant; therefore, it is not possible to conclusively determine whether renter households headed by a person of color are actually at a higher risk of an eviction filing. Rather, MAHC's analysis suggests that neighborhoods with a higher percentage of renters of color bear a disproportionate burden of eviction filings in Maine.

² MAHC's eviction database does not include all areas of Cumberland County or York County, but rather just those municipalities for which eviction actions are filed at the Portland or Biddeford courthouses. Since all evictions in Androscoggin County are filed at the courthouse in Lewiston, however, we were able to collect all of that county's eviction actions over the subject time period.

Portland-South Portland-Westbrook:

The most racially diverse census tracts in the region were home to 37% of the renter households but 51% of the eviction filings.

Saco-Biddeford:

The most racially diverse census tracts in the region were home to 66% of the renter households but 80% of the eviction filings.

This preliminary analysis suggests that communities of color are bearing a disproportionate burden of eviction activity in Maine's most diverse areas.³ Further analysis is required to factor in additional variables, including median income, but as the federal eviction moratorium expires on June 30th, and applications for rent relief in some of the most populous areas of state remain severely backlogged, MAHC and other housing advocates across the state are very concerned that eviction activity in Maine will increase significantly beginning in July and lead to long-term harm for low-income families across the state.

When an eviction judgment is entered, it appears on a tenant's rental history report and makes it much harder for them to secure a safe home in the future. Many housing providers screen prospective tenants out of the application process based on the appearance of an eviction judgment in their record.

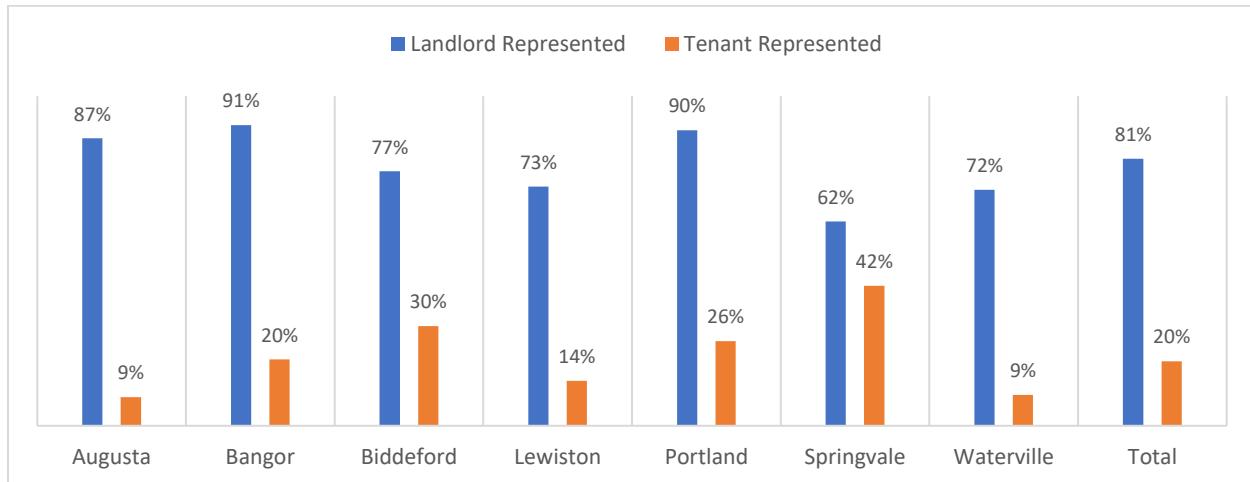
Further jeopardizing tenants at risk of eviction is an enormous disparity in legal representation: as shown below, MAHC's database reveals that landlords had the benefit of an attorney in 81% of eviction cases, while tenants had representation in only 20% of cases. Furthermore, those tenants who *did* have counsel were 85% more likely to avoid an eviction judgment than those who did not.

Given the clear data showing that legal representation is one of the most effective ways of reducing eviction judgments, MAHC strongly supports the newly announced partnership between Pine Tree Legal Assistance and MaineHousing to improve renters' access to counsel in eviction cases, and sees it as one of the most powerful eviction prevention initiatives that has ever been undertaken in Maine.

MAHC also encourages the Legislature to quickly pass LD 1508, which requires landlords to attach to eviction complaints a plain-language notice (to be created by the court system and made available to landlords for electronic download) to the tenant, containing critical information about the eviction process, the availability of mediation, and how the tenant can seek rental assistance, housing counseling or legal assistance. The provision of such information would be enormously helpful to both landlords and tenants, by allowing the parties to prevent some evictions from occurring.

³ Census tracts in each of these three areas of Maine were ordered based on the percentage of its renter households which are headed by a person of color, the top third being considered the most racially diverse census tracts in each area.

Landlord vs. Tenant Legal Representation in Eviction Cases



Likelihood of Eviction Judgment, Tenant Not Represented by Attorney vs. Represented

