



MAINE AFFORDABLE  
HOUSING COALITION

# MAHC

Interactive Discussion with  
Marisol Bello, Director of the



**Marisol Bello**

Director

HOUSING • |||||  
NARRATIVE LAB

<https://housingnarrativelab.org/>

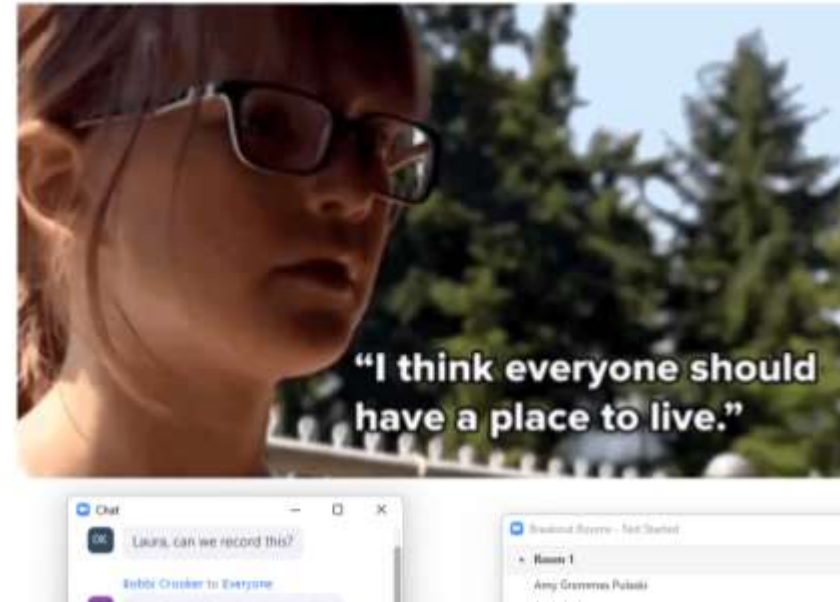
July 13, 2022



# Housing Narrative Lab Narrative Research May 2021

## KEY FINDINGS

- Majority of people want elected officials to address housing and ensure everyone can afford a place to live.
- Challenge is focusing and sustaining attention (intensity) on the issue.
- Messaging needs to clearly articulate a positive vision of the future we can achieve.
- Base and persuadable audiences are drawn to solutions-focused and action-oriented messaging that makes our desired vision for the future both tangible and irresistible.



Full slide deck from the Housing Narrative Lab available here:

[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1fpM\\_xay6rGSe2NZGVA3fIE69](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1fpM_xay6rGSe2NZGVA3fIE69)

# What is the narrative in Maine?

- Progress has been made and getting more attention
  - Value of stable housing;
  - Terminology changing to housing stability;
  - Bond passed, but because of making construction jobs;
- Rising costs right now; and fear of backlash of building more because of costs
- People understand the need; but hopelessness of being able to deal with it
- Workforce housing terminology is back and it plays better in communities, but is problematic
- Always the issue that if you build it people from away or people that don't deserve it will get it. Anecdotal stories of this can shape the narrative
- Logistics of funneling new projects is difficult to keep it moving at a quick pace (slow to develop)
- Narrative that homelessness is only an urban (Portland) issue. Not visible in the same ways; so its not here and therefore its not my issue to solve. Other community's problem to solve. Other people should solve it.
- Collaboration between towns and developers is needed
- Lowest income people are still not being helped

- Values: We need to earn enough to afford a home.
- Values/Race/Inclusion: No matter who we are, no matter what we look like, we all deserve a home.
- Root Causes: Connect root causes to wages, and/or our country's history of discrimination.

## LAB'S HOMELESSNESS NARRATIVE RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

### STRENGTHS

- ▲ LEAD WITH VALUES: People support our core values
- ▲ RACE: Explicit references to race test well.
- ▲ INCLUSION: People also respond to inclusive language.
- ▲ ROOT CAUSES: In the dials people respond positively when we connect the structural elements of systemic racism/income inequality to homelessness.

### WEAKNESSES

- ▲ SOLUTIONS: Sensitivities for policies that raise taxes.
- ▲ EFFICACY: Efficacy and cynicism is a big problem for us. People don't believe we can solve homelessness.
- ▲ PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY: Even our base is somewhat responsive to opposition messaging based on personal responsibility and poor personal decisions.
- ▲ ROOT CAUSES: • Systemic reasons for homelessness are not top associations, nor are a person's race/sexual orientation.

## HOUSING FIRST VIDEO AND SCRIPT

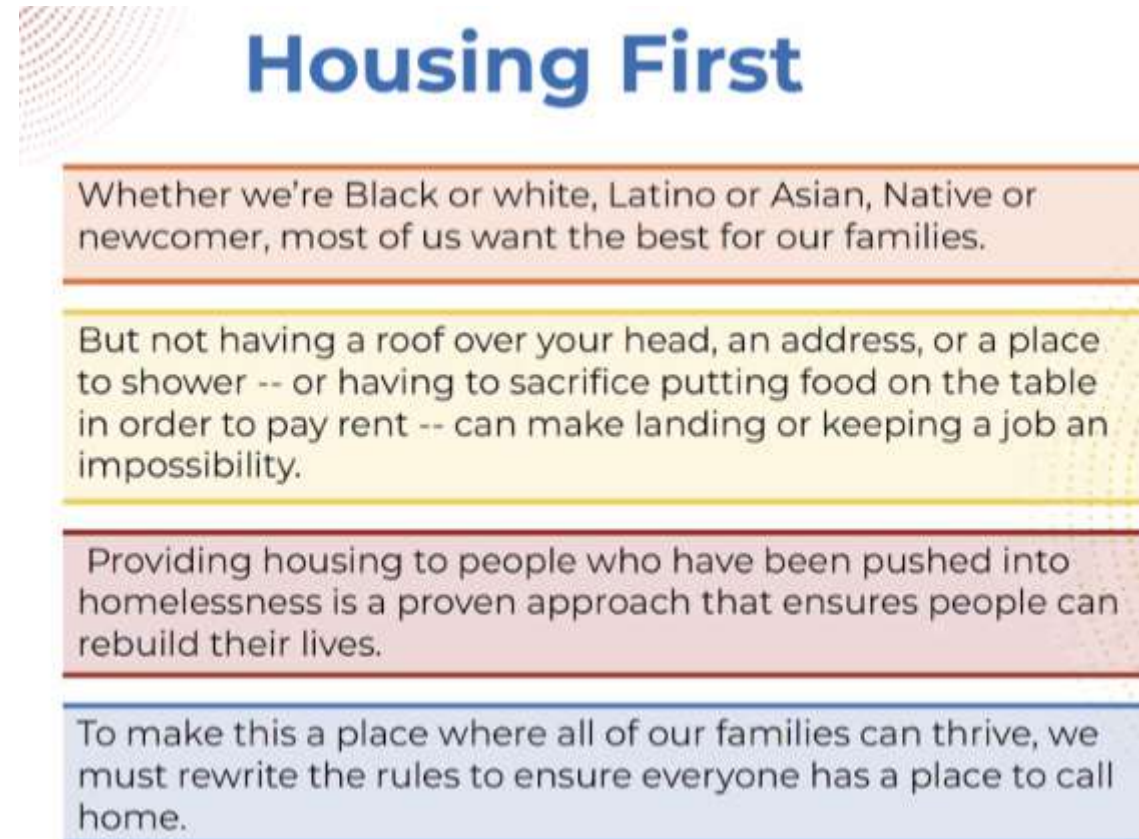
- See all videos here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCAJxxlQ1b693Vdn9c3In84WfvB1hHm2j>
- These videos and messages are intended to share the script so they can be used with local video

## DISCUSSION

- People respond well to messages about families, and children. Harder with single people.
- People have concerns about building the housing and then people from away might get it or those that don't deserve it.
- The messaging around housing as a first, foundational step towards finding and maintaining employment works well
- The last point aligns well with LD2003

## GOOD MESSAGES

- No matter who we are, we all want the best for our family.
- Not having a roof over our head, gets in the way of our family thriving.
- Then give a solution: Provide housing.



# Housing First

Whether we're Black or white, Latino or Asian, Native or newcomer, most of us want the best for our families.

But not having a roof over your head, an address, or a place to shower -- or having to sacrifice putting food on the table in order to pay rent -- can make landing or keeping a job an impossibility.

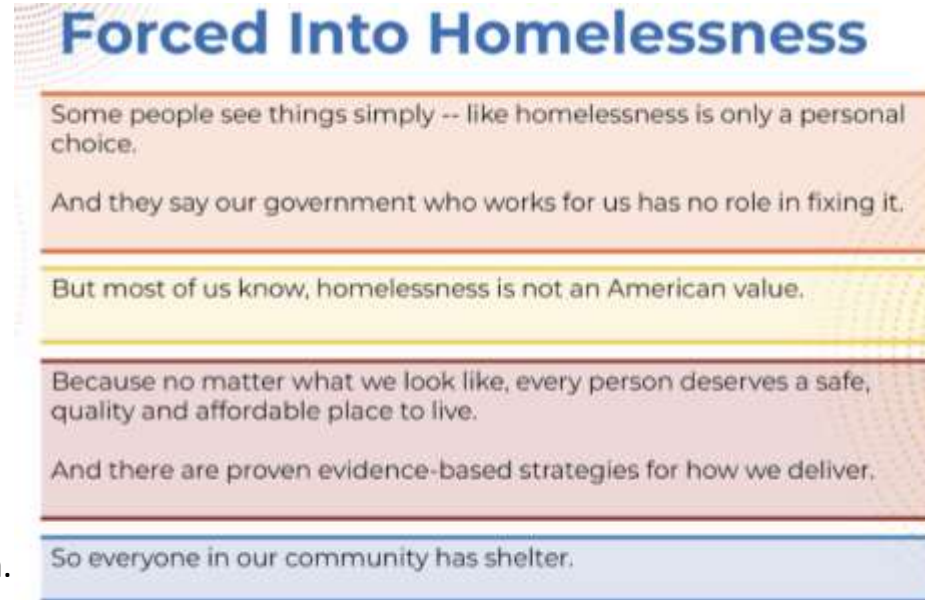
Providing housing to people who have been pushed into homelessness is a proven approach that ensures people can rebuild their lives.

To make this a place where all of our families can thrive, we must rewrite the rules to ensure everyone has a place to call home.



## VIDEO ON FORCED INTO HOMELESSNESS DISCUSSION:

- Maine was at the fore front in Housing First, so 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> points are key here.
- Instead of evidence based strategies, say “we have experience here doing this”
- We can move forward on a system that will solve homelessness
- Always try to mention and talk about ongoing efforts to change our system with Built for Zero
- Say, “solve homelessness” – it’s a puzzle to solve, versus “end” homelessness
- First two lines speak to “you” being one type of person as compared to how “others” think about this issue. This acknowledges the fear people see on the street, and reframes it.
- Maine hasn’t taken on attacking this issue until now with Built for Zero.
- We need to acknowledge that there are lots of different solutions and we know how to do them.
- What we hear in Portland is – more the financial equation.
  - We are ready to take this on, but the municipality can’t afford to do it alone. We need regional/larger approach.
- Provide hopeful solutions on how to solve the challenge. In both urban and rural communities.
- Rural communities don’t think its their problem. People see that there is a housing crisis, but its not the visible homelessness.
- How to address concerns: waste, etc.
  - Scarcity is the issue. So, focus on value: “Everyone deserves a home”. We will lose if we focus on funding with the other side.
  - Everyone needs to be healthy. Our kids need a place to live. These are values where we begin the conversation. That’s our north star.
  - Later, we bring in the funding. We need to create housing that’s in reach of people, that people can afford.
  - Don’t talk about subsidized, etc. Talk about housing that people can keep and maintain and pay for with their income.



# In Summary

- We've done the work to get people in homes.
- People don't have a place to live because they couch surf or sleep in their cars. They don't know when and where they will eat or meet their basic needs like showering.
- We need 20,000 homes. So we can provide people in Maine right now that need homes a safe place to live.
- No matter what part of Maine we are from or what we look like, we need to make sure that rents are affordable and push for solutions that will house people long term.
- We can make the world we imagine our reality by joining together.
- We can demand proven solutions, so everyone has a place to live.

# See Housing Narrative Lab Slides for more summary info here:

[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1fpM\\_xay6rGSe2NZGVA3fIE69I1-n3s95/edit#slide=id.p1](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1fpM_xay6rGSe2NZGVA3fIE69I1-n3s95/edit#slide=id.p1)

## WORDS TO EMBRACE AND WORDS TO REPLACE

SAY THIS	INSTEAD OF	BECAUSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ensuring everyone can afford a place to live</li><li>Ensuring everyone has a place to live</li><li>Ensuring every person has a roof over their heads</li><li>Ensuring every family has a place to call home</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Making stable housing more affordable</li><li>Creating programs that make housing affordable</li><li>Developing affordable housing units</li></ul>	<p>Puts people front and center and personalizes this issue. We must consistently remind people that shelter is a basic human need, as our opposition tries to frame housing first and foremost as a commodity.</p> <p>We also must illustrate the positive outcome that we will achieve, which is far more compelling than the process we choose to get there.</p>
We need to solve homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ending homelessness</li><li>Reducing homelessness</li></ul>	"Solving" implies that homelessness is a collective social problem we can tackle together, as opposed to an individual failing.
Local programs and services	Government programs and services	People are more favorable toward, and less cynical about, the ability of local programs and services to solve housing and homelessness issues.