

Contract with Maine's Working Class

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We live in an economy dominated by big corporations and the billionaire class. While the powerful reap all the rewards, the rest of us are left struggling to pay our bills and lead a decent life. We need an agenda that unites working people and puts our interests first, and no one can build it but us. The Contract with Maine's Working Class is like a contract campaign, but instead of being for one shop or sector, it's for everyone. These are our demands for what working people want to see our state elected officials fight for.

Move Towards Universal Healthcare and Tackle Soaring Healthcare Costs: Create a comprehensive public option for health insurance, empower the state to negotiate the cost of prescription drugs, and set reasonable nurse-to-patient ratios so people get good care when they need it.

The cost of health insurance has gone through the roof. Too many workers have lousy employer-provided plans that barely cover the basics, while other workers can't get enough hours to keep their good insurance. Meanwhile, lawmakers in Washington cut \$1 trillion from Medicaid to pay for tax cuts for billionaires. Maine needs a comprehensive public option that includes medical, dental, and vision, controls costs, and allows people to stick with the doctors they trust. To start, Maine should allow residents to buy into MaineCare – a trusted and affordable option that won't see premiums soaring each year. This is a major step towards a guarantee of universal health insurance so no one loses coverage when they change jobs or get sick, and no one goes uninsured because they can't afford their premiums.

Too many Mainers are forced to choose between filling a prescription and paying for groceries or heat. The state of Maine should have the authority to negotiate directly with pharmaceutical companies to bring down the price of prescription drugs. By using Maine's collective purchasing power, we can secure fairer prices for the medications seniors rely on every day. No senior in Maine should have to ration medication or skip doses because of cost.

But we can't fix healthcare without fixing unsafe staffing. When nurses are stretched too thin, patients wait longer, providers make mistakes, and burnout drives nurses out of the field. Setting nurse-to-patient ratios will protect patient safety, help retain experienced nurses, and ensure every Mainer gets the care they deserve.

Build and Preserve Housing that Working Families Can Afford: Ban large corporate ownership of housing, invest \$100M annually in public financing to build new or renovated workforce housing with union labor, and create a permanent Property Tax Relief Fund for working Mainers paid for by wealthy absentee landlords and second-home-owners contributing their fair share.

The cost of housing has risen much faster than incomes. Too many Mainers have to choose between buying groceries or paying for a roof over their heads. Young families are unable to afford a home – let alone find housing near their workplaces – while skyrocketing property taxes are squeezing Mainers of all ages, especially our retirees. Meanwhile, private-equity-backed corporations and other large institutional investors are gobbling up Maine land and housing – including mobile home parks – at a breathtaking pace, driving up prices even further.

We demand that the State of Maine take back control of our housing, and treat housing as what it is – homes that all working families deserve – not just an investment portfolio for the rich. The State should build on the federal ban to prohibit corporate ownership of all housing – including apartments and mobile home communities – and make it easier for residents to organize co-operatives and tenants unions. We demand that the state invest \$100M annually in low-cost financing to massively expand the supply of new and renovated housing - built under a project labor agreement with Maine's Building Trades Unions - at prices that nurses, firefighters, and teachers can actually afford. Finally, we demand that the state create a permanent Property Tax Relief Fund for working Mainers paid for by wealthy absentee and second-home-owners contributing their fair share.

Raise Wages to Keep Pace with Cost of Living, Level the Playing Field for All Workers and Make the Minimum Wage a True Living Wage: Pursue policies that strengthen all workers' bargaining power and organizing rights, close the pay gap for state employees, and raise Maine's minimum wage to \$20 per hour by 2030.

Too many workers in Maine work full time jobs but still can't make ends meet. Working families are straining under the skyrocketing costs of housing, health care, child care, food and utilities, and last year lawmakers in Washington slashed funding for health care and food assistance. Every working family should be paid enough to thrive. It's been a full decade since Maine voters last approved raising the minimum wage, and prices have soared since. It's time to raise the wage to \$20 per hour by 2030 with an annual adjustment so wages rise with prices.

The State should also use its purchasing and licensing authority to level the playing field for all workers. Maine should incentivize the use of Project Labor Agreements and labor harmony policies when it seeks contractors to do the people's work. And we have to make sure the state is paying competitive wages to state workers who deliver critical public services. We need to close the pay gap. The state should be raising the bar not racing to the bottom.

Chart a Path for Maine's Energy Future: Stabilize electricity rates by massively investing in upgrades that make our grid more efficient and better prepared for extreme weather, and rapidly deploy new in-state clean energy capacity – all built with union labor.

High energy costs — especially electricity, heating oil, and gasoline — have risen far faster than Mainers' paychecks, making it unaffordable for too many to heat and cool their homes or drive to work. Local communities are inundated by severe storms that damage roads and bridges, while more frequent droughts threaten to dry up well water that tens of thousands of Mainers depend on. Meanwhile, the federal government's all-out assault on clean energy has taken jobs away from the very Maine workers who could build cheaper, home-grown clean energy.

We demand that Maine tap into our rich supply of clean energy resources, making us less dependent on global markets and impacted by foreign wars. We call on state regulators to hold large energy corporations accountable for controlling their costs and to address the rising and unpredictable cost of electricity generation while investing in Maine union jobs.

Affordable, High-Quality Childcare for All Working Families: Make childcare free for working families and support parents who choose to stay home. Pay childcare workers like other educators to build the supply of care that families need.

Too many young parents are paying as much as a second mortgage just to get childcare for their kids. Meanwhile, childcare workers are among the lowest paid workers in our state. We need to give parents a real choice about child care - they need a safe and free option away from home, or financial support for parents who leave their jobs to care for kids. If we don't look out for childcare workers, they won't be there to look after our children, which hurts working families and holds our economy back. Our federal and state governments need to invest \$400 million per year in Maine to ensure safe, high-quality childcare for

all working families. We need universal, affordable, childcare with well-paid workers.

Make Wealthy People and Big Corporations Pay their Fair Share: Raise taxes on those who have done best in our economy to fund the public goods we all need.

For too long, our tax code has tilted the scales in favor of the wealthy and well-connected, while working Mainers shoulder more and more of the cost of public goods. People across Maine are struggling to fund their schools, pay their property taxes, and cover the grocery bill each week. We need to undo state income tax cuts that overwhelmingly benefited the richest households, raise the top corporate income tax rate so the biggest, most profitable companies pay what they truly owe, and close the loopholes that let millionaires and billionaires shield their wealth from taxation. Maine can only meet our people's needs if the wealthiest among us finally pay their fair share.

End Grocery Store Price Gouging: Make food affordable for all by banning corporate price gouging by supermarkets and fully restoring and expanding SNAP benefits cut by the federal government last year.

Working families shouldn't have to pay more for groceries because supermarket chains and massive online retailers rig the market in their favor. When prices started rising due to supply chain disruptions and global conflict, the consolidated food industry took advantage by jacking up food prices on families who had nowhere else to turn. Huge supermarket corporations and online retailers squeeze suppliers for special pricing deals, but do not pass the savings on to their customers. They know we can't choose to stop feeding our families. Strong local grocery stores are lifelines for small towns across Maine, but they're under threat from predatory pricing.

We need to crack down on corporate abuse so people in rural communities aren't paying even more to feed their families. We also need to restore and expand SNAP benefits after Washington lawmakers slashed food assistance in 2025. No one in our state should go hungry because they can't afford the cost of groceries.

Prepare Maine Workers for the Jobs of the Future: Permanently fund free community college and provide the resources necessary to double the number of high-quality registered apprenticeships.

Maine must adopt policies that enable workers to access quality jobs in new and growing industries, as rapid advances in technology and so-called artificial

intelligence continue to transform our economy. This requires funding for enhanced education and training resources - such as the programs delivered by union Joint Apprenticeship Training Councils - that are available and affordable to individuals entering the workforce or transitioning to new occupations, as well as for necessary supportive services during training such as income, housing, transportation and child-care.

Protect Workers from Employer Abuses: Empower the Maine Department of Labor to enforce labor standards by hiring more inspectors, penalizing wage theft, and rooting out worker misclassification.

Wage theft continues to deny hard-working Mainers the incomes they've earned and are legally entitled to. Misclassifying employees as independent contractors, falsely exempting them from overtime, and failing to keep proper records and to pay on time are all ways employees are not getting a fair shake. Maine's Department of Labor needs to provide the tools workers need to protect them on the job and make sure an honest day's work receives the pay it deserves.

Allow Older and Disabled Mainers to Live in their Communities with Dignity and Independence: Raise pay for direct care workers so they can deliver the care and support people need.

Every aging and disabled person in Maine needs access to supports and services that allow them to lead meaningful lives. After working for decades, older Mainers deserve the care they need to live long, independent lives. The only way that care will be there for them is if care workers need to earn livable wages and benefits. Too often, direct care workers are forced to leave their jobs for better-paying work, which causes shortages and instability for their clients. We need to increase MaineCare reimbursement rates to raise wages and benefits, improve the quality of care, reduce turnover, and stabilize the care workforce.

Defend Mainers from Unchecked AI Development: Demand employers to negotiate with workers over the implementation of AI. Implement meaningful guardrails on AI that protect workers. Require data centers in Maine to have project labor and community benefit agreements, to pay for upgrading our power grid, and to bring their own energy.

While working families struggle to pay rising bills on too-low wages, they're also staring down unchecked artificial intelligence development that enriches the few and harms the many. Mainers need assurances that as artificial intelligence enters our lives, they can have some control over its deployment. Employers

must negotiate with their workers to ensure AI is used to complement, not replace, hard work.

As Maine develops its approach to data centers, certain aspects must be non-negotiable: together we must determine what kind of data will be housed in our state as well as the acceptable size of the facility. Data centers must not raise power bills, drain the local water supply, or make nearby homes unlivable. They must come with strong financial investment in community-driven priorities. They must be constructed under a project labor agreement and never get in the way of workers' decision to organize.