THE OPPORTUNITY AGENDA

A BUDGET THAT STRENGTHENS OUR STATE

MAINE LEGISLATIVE DEMOCRATS
2017 BUDGET PRIORITIES
WE HAVE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO INVEST IN A THRIVING ECONOMY

Our budget covers current services in the existing budget and makes new investments in our state and its people. Based on current law and economic growth above previous projections, we have the opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of Mainers.

We can do this while rejecting unnecessary cuts and without raising additional taxes.

The Opportunity Agenda reflects the best things about our state and its people. New initiatives outlined in The Opportunity Agenda are funded by the following revenue streams over the biennium:
Mainers deserve a budget that reflects the best things about our state and its people: We are resilient and know how to come together to solve problems. We know what it takes to rebuild an economy that is fair for everybody and creates more good-paying jobs that allow young people to stay in Maine.

The problems we need to solve are bigger than this budget, bigger than the next two years, and bigger than the current administration.

**Maine Democrats believe that Maine has a bright future. A Maine where families have security and freedom to grow and prosper. A Maine where family-supporting jobs are homegrown in every community across our state. A Maine where those working hard can get ahead and stay ahead.**

Maine is strongest when families are thriving. We must capitalize on our natural advantages, deliver quality services, and invest in Maine’s future. We have heard from Mainers across the state, and we commit to being the voice of the people in this budget debate.

The fact is, the current budget proposal from the administration cuts taxes for the wealthiest, while leaving working Mainers behind. Trickle down economics has failed everywhere it’s been tried. Maine deserves better.

The Opportunity Agenda is a transformational plan for Maine’s economy that pulls people together, instead of choosing winners and losers. It puts Maine families first, giving them the tools they need to build the future they deserve. We do it by lowering property taxes, making education attainable, and promoting job growth and small business development.

**We can achieve this while rejecting unnecessary cuts and without raising additional taxes.**
THE OPPORTUNITY TO
PASS THE LARGEST PROPERTY TAX CUT IN MAINE’S HISTORY

For years, Maine’s tax system has given more to the wealthiest in our state while providing less to local communities and homeowners. Property taxes have skyrocketed as communities have tried to cover the cost of education and other essential services that have been ignored by Augusta. These ballooning property taxes are tearing communities apart and jeopardizing the ability of seniors and struggling families to stay in their homes.

Democrats are dedicated to restoring tax fairness and providing the largest property tax relief effort in Maine history.

Our budget directly cuts property taxes by $83 million for Maine residents by increasing the Homestead Exemption for all Maine homeowners by 50 percent and by increasing the Property Tax Fairness Credit. Our plan expands the benefit to reach more Maine households and gives a larger benefit for Maine families – without raising any new taxes.

The Opportunity Agenda also eases the pressure on property tax rates by fully funding education and increasing revenue sharing to three percent for local services like police, fire, and public works, while rejecting the governor’s unnecessary cuts.

Our plan uses every tool available to provide the largest property tax relief effort in our state’s history.

- **Increase Homestead Exemption** - This program reduces property tax bills by exempting a portion of the home’s value from tax assessment. Our plan increases the share of exempted value by 50 percent - going from $20,000 to $30,000.

- **Expand Property Tax Fairness Credit** - This program gives refundable tax credits to low- and middle-income homeowners and renters to offset high property tax and rent costs.

- **Increase Revenue Sharing to 3%** - The Municipal Revenue Sharing program diverts a percentage of the state’s total sales and income tax revenue back to communities to cover the cost of essential services such as law enforcement, road and bridge maintenance, and fire protection.

- **Fully Fund Public Schools** - In 2016, Maine voters passed a citizens initiative to impose a three percent surcharge on the top two percent of Maine earners. Fully funding education will reduce pressure on our communities to raise property taxes in order to cover a lack of funding for our kids and our teachers.
THE OPPORTUNITY TO SUPPORT THE ECONOMY, JOBS, AND INNOVATION

Maine’s economy has begun to recover from the great recession, but those gains haven’t been felt by everyone, particularly in rural Maine. Instead of growing together, we’re in danger of growing apart – with too few good-paying jobs, greater inequality, and a lack of basic economic security and fairness for working families.

Our plan has a strategic approach to making sure Mainers have the skills needed to fill existing and new jobs. Good-paying jobs in teaching, healthcare, construction, manufacturing, and hospitality are facing critical workforce shortages. By working with Maine’s community colleges, we’re funding vocational training that will put people to work as soon as they graduate.

Attracting, developing, and scaling small business is paramount to Maine’s success. That’s why The Opportunity Agenda boosts funding to the Maine Venture Fund and the Maine Technology Institute, to help proven start-ups succeed. Fostering entrepreneurship and innovation is a key component to our economic future.

We also know that economic development is built on a safe, modern infrastructure. Maine uses bonds to make the investments that keep people safe and help their businesses get to market. The large costs of building and maintaining these infrastructure systems become more affordable when the state spreads the cost over several years using bonds.

Any general fund spending needs to be accompanied by a robust bond package that will fix our roads and bridges, improve access to high speed Internet, and promote research and development – all while putting Mainers to work.

- **Buildout Targeted Community College Workforce Development** - This funding supports existing programs that work with Maine businesses, healthcare facilities, and nonprofit agencies across the state to help them build the workforce they need to grow and prosper.

- **Boost Ongoing Funding to Attract, Scale, and Develop Small Businesses** through the Maine Venture Fund and the Maine Technology Institute.

- **Expand Broadband** - Access to reliable, high-speed Internet is critical to recruiting workers to our state, ensuring all of our students have access to world-class educational resources, lowering healthcare costs, increasing productivity, saving consumers money, growing small businesses, and allowing Mainers to work where they live.

- **Invest in Infrastructure** - Keeping our critical physical infrastructure sound will create good-paying jobs in our state and enable a thriving local economy. Our plan will repair the crumbling transportation infrastructure, creating jobs in the short and long term and increasing efficiency in our economy.

- **Support Research and Development** - We’ve got what it takes to get ahead, but we need successful public, private, and non-profit partnerships in research and development. Research and development plays a critical role in the innovation process. It’s essentially an investment in technology and future capabilities - by harnessing what’s best about our state and getting us to the next level.
Mainers understand that ensuring our children receive a high-quality education is essential to their success and to our state’s long-term prosperity. Every child deserves a fair shot. But today, too many of our children are denied that opportunity.

To thrive in the 21st century, our kids need quality early childhood development, a modern, fully-funded K-12 curriculum, and access to affordable post-secondary options, including universities, community colleges, vocational schools and apprenticeship programs. Such opportunity will prepare our children and grandchildren for today’s jobs and tomorrow’s new economies.

Mainers have always relied on our ingenuity to design programs and policies that make a real difference in communities throughout the state. And because we take seriously our role as stewards of the next generation, we have made commitments to fostering the health and well-being of our youngest citizens, particularly the most vulnerable. Head Start represents one of these commitments. Pre-kindergarten would be the opportunity to expand on that and educate more early learners at a critical time in their brain development.

Our plan invests in students from the beginning to the end of their educations. For many, post-secondary education and adequate training is a necessity, not a luxury. But it’s unaffordable for too many Mainers and leaves others drowning in debt.

**That’s why The Opportunity Agenda establishes The Maine Promise.** There aren’t enough educated applicants in the workforce to fill a new generation of technically complicated jobs. Democrats are committed to creating a pathway that guarantees more people can start and complete a degree in our community colleges. By investing in our existing community college infrastructure, and by launching a “last dollar” scholarship program, our initiative will make higher education accessible to more Mainers, while ensuring that those in programs graduate and are able to transition into the workforce. The average student debt burden in Maine is $29,644, a cost that leaves too many young Mainers unable to get ahead.

- **Expand Pre-Kindergarten and Head Start** - Not only will The Opportunity Agenda reject the current administration’s cuts to Head Start, we provide start-up costs to use during the first year to implement new pre-kindergarten programs. Additional funding for pre-K and Head Start would give more young Mainers an opportunity to thrive as children, and later as productive adults.

- **Create The Maine Promise** - Democrats are committed to creating a pathway that guarantees more people can start and complete a degree in our community colleges. By investing in our existing community college infrastructure, and by launching a “last dollar” scholarship program, our initiative will make higher education accessible to more Mainers, while ensuring that those in programs graduate and are able to transition into the workforce.

- **Direct Student Debt Relief** - Funding would support a new program that would forgive a portion of eligible Mainers’ student debt load, while refinancing the remainder at a significantly lower rate. The combination of forgiveness and refinancing will allow graduates to more fully participate in Maine’s economy.

- **Fully Fund Public Schools** - Fully funding education, as demanded by voters in 2016, ensures that every kid – regardless of their zip code – gets the resources they need to learn.
THE OPPORTUNITY TO TRULY VALUE MAINE FAMILIES

“Family values” means valuing families. All Maine families should be provided the opportunity to prosper in our great state. This includes children, parents, grandparents, young, old, and everyone in between. We aim to invest in Maine families, which in turn will result in healthier families, stronger communities, and a thriving economy.

Valuing families means valuing seniors. Maine’s long-term care system allows for the right care at the right time in the right setting. But access and quality are threatened if we don’t have enough caregivers. Our plan will address the shortage in long-term care staffing. This plan makes sure we can attract and retain quality workers by increasing reimbursement rates in the fields that care for the health and well-being of our families, including nursing home, direct care, home care, and assisted living workers.

Valuing families means valuing children. Our plan will take the necessary steps to lift children out of poverty by ensuring their parents have the tools to find family-supporting jobs. We know that working parents need education and training to gain the skills needed to access jobs that pay. When people can make ends meet, it helps families while growing the economy. At the same time, it will increase the number of highly-skilled workers needed for Maine’s employers and our economy. This plan provides a comprehensive approach for families to get training, skills, and ultimately the actual good jobs that pay a decent wage.

It also means valuing the veterans in our communities. By building support systems for veterans within our communities we can not only help connect veterans with VA care and resources, but also provide targeted services addressing unmet needs. This plan represents a promise to support veterans and to invest in the successful transition of returning veterans of the ongoing conflicts overseas. Our commitment to Maine’s service members and veterans is equal to the full measure of devotion that they have committed to us.

Maine is strongest when families are thriving. We must deliver quality services and we must invest in Maine’s future. The opportunity is too great not to.

• **Ensure a Strong Health Care Infrastructure** - This plan makes sure we can attract and retain quality workers by increasing reimbursement rates in the fields that care for the health and well-being of our families, including nursing home, direct care, home care, and assisted living workers.

• **Utilize Existing Federal Funds Dedicated to Lifting Children Out Poverty** - This initiative will stabilize families by ensuring basics like housing and heat, create economic opportunities for families to get ahead, and break down barriers to employment.

• **Increase State and Community Resources for Veterans in Crisis** - This plan makes sure that when a veteran has a delay or a barrier to getting VA care there are other resources available to help fill that gap. It builds state and local capacity for mental health care, strengthens local veterans service organizations, and pilots a ride program for veterans that can’t get to VA facilities on their own.

• **Make Targeted State Investments in Returning Veterans** - Our plan expands the successful veteran treatment court in Kennebec County for veterans living in other parts of the state, invests in the only shelter in Maine for female veterans and their children, and supports efforts to give service members credit for their military experience with accelerated training programs to speed entry into civilian careers.
THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS A CRISIS IN OUR STATE

Our plan could not take a comprehensive look at the issues addressing our state and not confront the opioid crisis. This public health epidemic is taking a heartbreaking toll on too many Maine families. Unlike the current budget proposal from the administration, we do not ignore this crisis - we face it head on. Our agenda pledges to provide the resources necessary so that every Mainer who wants treatment can get it and start on the road to recovery.

Our state’s most powerful tool in fighting the epidemic is on the ballot this November, which is why we fully endorse the Medicaid expansion referendum. Every day that passes without action to provide these additional resources is a missed opportunity to save lives.

However, we cannot simply wait until November. Our agenda will fund strategies endorsed by lawmakers and experts in the fields of substance use disorders, treatment, and law enforcement and represent holistic solutions to this epidemic facing our communities.

- **Employ Effective Strategies for Substance Use Prevention and Treatment** as laid out in the report of the Maine Opiate Collaborative and the forthcoming work of the Task Force to Address the Opiate Crisis in the State. Our agenda will provide funding for programs endorsed by lawmakers and experts in the fields of substance use disorders, treatment, and law enforcement and represent holistic solutions to this epidemic facing our communities.
The Opportunity To Pass the Largest Property Tax Cut in Maine’s History

**Increase Homestead Exemption** | $50 million
This program reduces property tax bills by exempting a portion of a home’s value from tax assessment. Our plan increases the share of exempted value by 50 percent - going from $20,000 to $30,000.

**Expand Property Tax Fairness Credit** | $33 million
This program gives refundable tax credits to low- and middle-income homeowners and renters to offset property tax bills.

**Increase Revenue Sharing to 3%** | $64 million
The Municipal Revenue Sharing program diverts a percentage of the state’s total sales and income tax revenue back to communities to cover the cost of essential services such as law enforcement, road and bridge maintenance, and fire protection.

**Fully Fund Public Schools** | Estimated $370 million*
Fully funding education will reduce pressure on communities to raise property taxes in order to cover a lack of funding for our kids and our teachers.

*Funded by the three percent surcharge on the top two percent of Maine earners, as approved by voters in 2016.

The Opportunity to Support the Economy, Jobs, and Innovation

**Targeted Community College Workforce Development** | $10 million
This funding supports existing programs that work with Maine businesses, healthcare facilities, and nonprofit agencies across the state to help them build the workforce they need to grow and prosper.

**Maine Venture Fund and Maine Technology Institute Funding** | $1 million
Increasing funding to boost ongoing incubator programs to attract, scale, and develop small businesses.

**Expand Broadband Access** | Bond
Students, workers, businesses, healthcare providers, and entrepreneurs all need reliable, high-speed Internet. A broadband bond would give Maine the resources necessary to ensure all communities have access to this critical infrastructure.

**Invest in Infrastructure** | Bond
Keeping our critical physical infrastructure sound will create good-paying jobs in our state and enable a thriving local economy. Our plan will repair the crumbling transportation infrastructure, creating jobs in the short and long term and increasing efficiency in our economy.

**Support Research and Development** | Bond
Research and development plays a critical role in building our economy. It’s an investment in innovation, technology, and future capabilities - it’s harnessing what’s best about our state and getting us to the next level.
OPPORTUNITY AGENDA POLICY OVERVIEW

EXPENDITURES

Note: all figures are for the biennium.

The Opportunity to Educate our Students

The Maine Promise | $24 million
Democrats are committed to creating a pathway that guarantees more people can start and complete a degree in our community colleges. By investing in our existing community college infrastructure, and by launching a “last dollar” scholarship program, our initiative will make higher education accessible to more Mainers, while ensuring that those in the program graduate and are able to transition into the workforce.

Expand Pre-Kindergarten and Head Start | $4 million
Head Start is a comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement service for low-income children and their families. Additional funding for pre-K and Head Start would give more young Mainers an opportunity to thrive as children, and later as productive adults.

Fully Fund Public Schools | Estimated $370 million*
Fully funding education will reduce pressure on communities to raise property taxes in order to cover a lack of funding for our kids and our teachers.
*Funded by the three percent surcharge on the top two percent of Maine earners, as approved by voters in 2016.

Direct Student Debt Relief | Bond
Funding from this bond would support a new program that would forgive a portion of an eligible Mainer’s student debt load while refinancing the remainder at a significantly lower rate. The combination of forgiveness and refinancing will allow graduates to more fully participate in Maine’s economy.

The Opportunity to Value Maine Families

Direct Care Worker Reimbursement | $55 Million
Maine can attract and retain quality workers by increasing reimbursement rates and paying a fair wage to those who care for the health and wellbeing of our families, including professionals who work in nursing homes, direct care, home care, and assisted living facilities.

Leverage Investments in Families Today (LIFT) | Existing Federal Funds
This initiative leverages existing federal funds to reduce poverty by ensuring families can afford basics such as housing and heat, creating economic opportunities for families to get ahead, and breaking down barriers to employment.

Veterans’ Access to Mental Health Care | $2.5 million
This funding builds state and local capacity for mental health care and strengthens local veterans service organizations. In addition, it expands the veteran treatment court in Kennebec County, invests in the only shelter in Maine for female veterans and their children, and supports efforts to give service members credit for their military experience with accelerated training programs.

The Opportunity to Address a Crisis in Our State

Opioid Epidemic Funding | $5 million
This funding will support the strategies endorsed by the Task Force to Address the Opiate Crisis in our State.
The Opportunity Agenda reflects the best things about our state and its people. The fact is, the current proposal from the administration cuts taxes for the wealthiest, while leaving working Mainers behind. Trickle down economics has failed everywhere it has been tried.

Maine deserves better.

The Opportunity Agenda is a transformational plan for Maine’s economy that involves pulling people together, instead of choosing winners and losers. It puts Maine families first, giving them the tools they need to build the future they deserve. We do it by lowering property taxes, making education attainable, and promoting job growth.

WE KNOW THAT’S WHAT MAINERS WANT AND WE INTEND TO DELIVER.
THE OPPORTUNITY AGENDA

A BUDGET THAT STRENGTHENS OUR STATE

MAINE LEGISLATIVE DEMOCRATS
2017 BUDGET PRIORITIES

THE OPPORTUNITY TO:

Pass the Largest Property Tax Cut in Maine’s History
Support the Economy, Jobs and Innovation
Educate our Students
Value Maine Families