

## **A Safe Home Is Not a Privilege — It's a Human Right**

By Michelle Lamm

My name is Michelle Lamm, and I'm the Executive Director of Greater Portland Family Promise. At Family Promise, we support families facing homelessness on their path to sustainable independence through a compassionate, community-based response. Our vision is simple but urgent: a community where every family has a home, a livelihood, and the opportunity to build a better future.

Every day, we confront the housing crisis head-on — and we do so with the goal of strengthening families' chances for long-term stability and economic mobility. Through our Housing Navigation and Homelessness Prevention Program, we provide comprehensive case management, transitional housing, rental assistance, food support, and move-in assistance. Our work is centered on housing stability and family well-being, and our case managers walk alongside families, connecting them to healthcare, education, employment, and other vital resources.

And yet, despite these efforts, a crisis is unfolding right before our eyes. Not just in Portland, not just in Maine — but across the country. Far too many families, particularly immigrant families, asylum seekers, and families from African nations, are experiencing homelessness, their needs unmet and their voices unheard.

Maine has long been a place where newcomers seek safety, rebuild their lives, and create better futures for their children. A place that proudly calls itself "the way life should be." But for too many immigrant families, life here has become an uphill battle for survival.

The lack of affordable housing, the shortage of shelter space, the barriers to work authorization, and the underfunding of essential public resources have created a humanitarian crisis. And under the Trump administration, this already dire situation is being deepened by policy decisions rooted in fear, exclusion, and cruelty.

At Family Promise, we walk with families who have lost everything — their homes, their stability, and too often, their hope. But what we are seeing now is not simply personal hardship. We are witnessing a system that is actively pushing families deeper into poverty and homelessness — especially New Americans.

Imagine being a mother who has fled violence and persecution, risking everything to bring your children to safety. You cross borders, rivers, and mountains, believing you've finally reached refuge in Maine. But instead, you find shelter beds full, affordable housing nearly nonexistent, and rents skyrocketing beyond the reach of even working families. You face barrier after barrier — all while the rhetoric from the highest levels of government sends a chilling message: you don't belong here.

The Trump administration has launched a full-scale assault on low-income and immigrant families, including unprecedented threats of mass deportation. Families who fled violence and persecution arrive seeking safety, only to be met with detention, deportation proceedings, and indefinite legal limbo.

Humanitarian parole has been stripped away from many, including Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans — families who once had lawful pathways to apply for asylum. Even those who entered the country on valid visas now face the threat of immediate removal. Across Maine, families are receiving confusing, fear-inducing emails demanding they leave, even when the notices don't apply to them. The panic and heartbreak are real.

And immigration isn't the only front under attack. We are watching proposals unfold that:

- Slash Medicaid and SNAP, cutting off healthcare and food for families and children.
- Reduce funding for Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Education, deepening the housing and school resource crisis.
- Eliminate FEMA emergency shelter funding that communities like Portland relied on.
- Dismantle Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts that are designed to uplift and protect marginalized voices.

This isn't policy. It's punishment.

And this isn't just an immigration issue. It's a housing issue. A racial justice issue. An economic justice issue. And above all, it is a moral issue.

At Family Promise, we see firsthand the power of community. We help families rebuild their lives, but charity alone will never be enough. No nonprofit, no faith group, no city can solve this crisis without strong, protective policies and real systemic change.

We need policies that reflect our shared values:

- Policies that fund affordable housing at every level — from emergency shelters to permanent homes.

- Policies that expedite work authorization for asylum seekers, so families can support themselves.
- Policies that protect immigrant families from discrimination, exploitation, and unsafe living conditions.
- Policies that recognize housing as a human right, not a privilege.
- Policies that fully fund SNAP and school meal programs, so no child is left hungry.

The families I work with can't wait for the next election cycle. Every day without housing is another day of trauma. Every delay in work permits is another day of forced poverty. Every pathway blocked is another child left without stability.

So here's my call to action:

When you talk about immigration, talk about housing.

When you talk about housing, talk about the families — the mothers, fathers, and children — who are being pushed into homelessness by policies designed to exclude them.

When you meet with your elected officials, demand that immigrant and asylum-seeking families are seen, protected, and included.

Demand that Congress reject cruelty and fund programs that shelter families, feed children, and create opportunities — not walls.

Families aren't asking for handouts. They're asking for a chance to contribute, to belong, and to thrive. And it's up to all of us — as neighbors, advocates, and voters — to make sure they get that chance.

Let's meet this moment with compassion and courage, not complacency. Let's be the community that stands up, not the one that looks away.

And as we rise to this challenge, I invite you to join us on April 22nd for Family Promise Giving Day — a national day of giving to support families experiencing homelessness. This year, we are raising funds for the very programs that change lives: case management, transitional housing, food assistance, and rental support. With your help, we can ensure more families avoid homelessness and have the resources they need to thrive.

To learn more and make a gift, visit [Insert Giving Day campaign link].

Together, we can ensure every family has a place to call home.