

State of Working Maine 2025

Strengthening Economic Opportunity in Rural Communities and Beyond



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Introduction

Maine's rural character is central to its identity — and that rurality also poses economic challenges for many Mainers. Policymakers and politicians alike often look for ways to address the problems of Maine's rural economy but sometimes make the mistake of assuming "rural Maine" is a distinct entity with unique problems or perspectives that require novel solutions. This report challenges that idea by showing the solutions that address the regional differences in Maine's economy will benefit Mainers living on low incomes or facing other economic headwinds throughout the state.

The idea of "the two Maines" has become a common refrain since it was coined by future United States Senator George Mitchell.¹ It is sometimes imagined as a divide between a "rural Maine" and the rest of the state, but as Mitchell pointed out, the "two Maines" often exist side by side — natural beauty and close-knit communities together with high unemployment and elevated levels of poverty.²

To some extent, the entire state operates as a rural economy, which tends to bring more isolation and less connection to the economic opportunities that cluster in urban centers.³ Rural Americans are more likely to be unemployed,⁴ less likely to have a college degree,⁵ and have lower earnings, on average, than Americans in urban areas.⁶ Rural county residents are more likely to lack access to fast and reliable internet⁷ and travel longer distances to get medical care.⁸

This means despite identifiable geographic differences within Maine, Mainers have more in common economically than some would believe. The way to bridge the divide between Mainers — and between the different parts of Maine — is through support from the state and federal governments that ensures fair allocation of resources and prevents anyone from being left behind. In this way, lawmakers can preserve "the way life should be" without sacrificing opportunity or prosperity.

In the words of workers:

"Maine can be a challenging place to live. We all choose to live here because of so many wonderful things, but many of us have chosen to do with less. We have less access to some services and resources, but greater access to the beauty and the splendor and all that good stuff. Some people move here and think they can get a one-for-one big city experience, when in reality it's a give and take.

That's one thing that's great about Mainers in general. We do more with what we have. Let's all get together to make this work for everybody, because that's what Mainers are doing."

- *Jamie, grocery store manager*

Maine's economic regions

While it is overly simplistic to divide Maine into a “rural” and an “urban” area, it is worth considering the ways in which the state’s economy varies geographically. Rurality in Maine is more of a spectrum than a true divide; even the most “urban” areas of the state are rural compared to Boston or New York. Yet any Mainer will tell you living in Portland is a very different experience from living in Paris or Presque Isle. On the other hand, Presque Isle is the urban service center for someone living in Ashland.

This continuity presents a challenge for data analysis. A fine-grain examination of Maine’s more and less rural areas might use small geographic areas like US Department of Agriculture’s Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes.⁹ But obtaining accurate and timely data for such small geographic units is difficult.

For this report, Maine is divided into six different regions, centered around Maine’s counties, and adapted from geographic divisions used by the US Census Bureau:

The **Portland Metro** region consists of Cumberland, Sagadahoc, and York counties. Where possible, the report distinguishes between the **Core Metro** area of Portland, South Portland, and Westbrook and the remainder of the metro area.

The **Central** region consists of Androscoggin, Kennebec, and Penobscot counties.

The **Mid-Coast** region consists of Hancock, Knox, Lincoln, and Waldo counties.

The **Western** region consists of Franklin, Oxford, and Somerset counties.

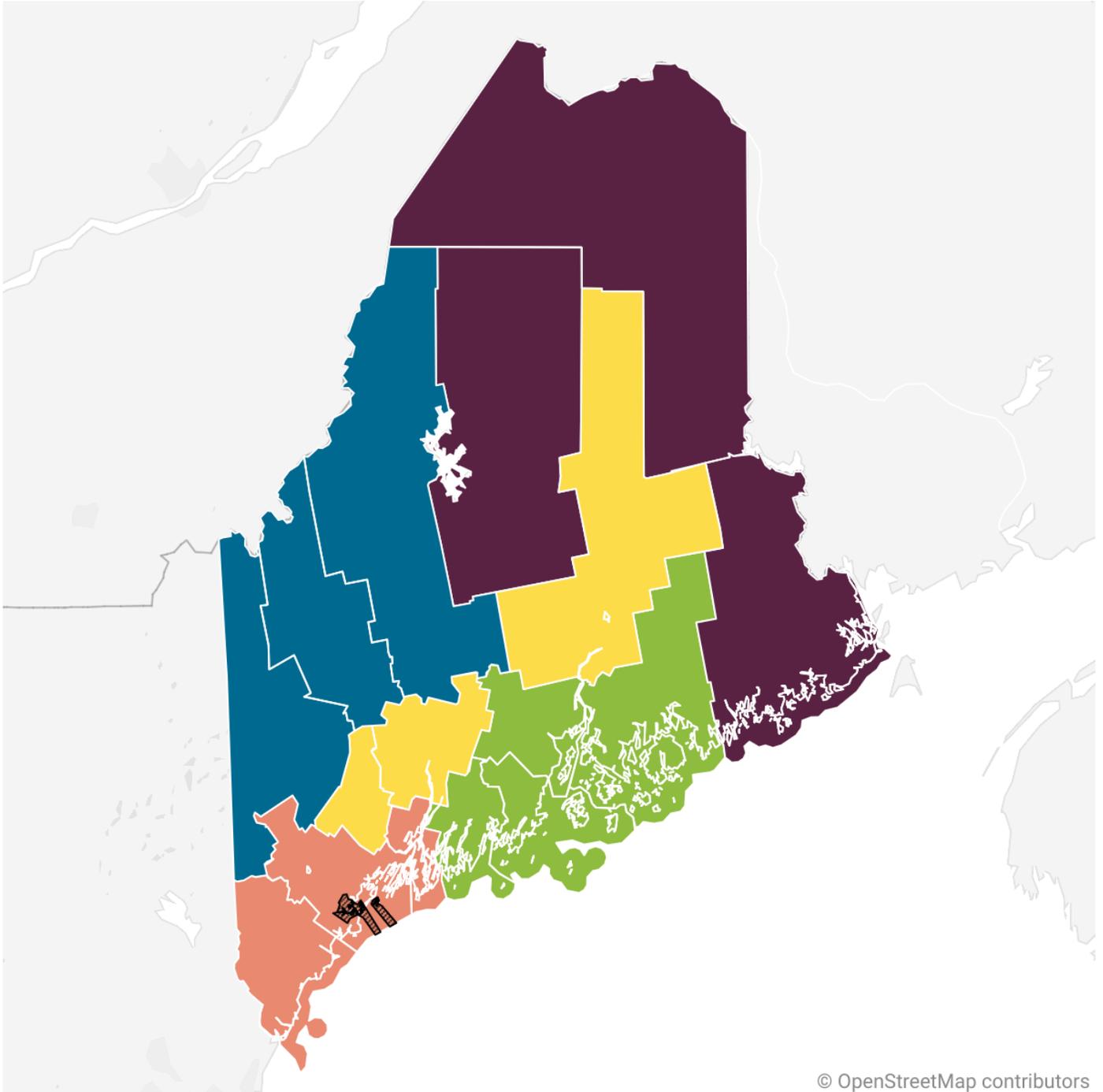
The **Northeast** region consists of Aroostook, Piscataquis, and Washington counties.

Population by Rural-Urban Classification

Region	Population
Core Portland Metro	118,251
Outer Portland Metro	453,283
Central Maine	400,573
Mid-Coast Maine	175,035
Western Maine	142,279
Northeast Maine	115,591
Total	1,405,012

SOURCE: MECEP analysis of US Bureau of Economic Analysis, Real Gross Domestic Product data through 2023. Recovery based on GDP per capita, calculated using US Census Bureau, American Community Survey data and US Census Bureau County Population Estimates.

Maine's Economic Regions



© OpenStreetMap contributors

 Portland Core

 Portland Metro

 Central Maine

 Mid-Coast Maine

 Western Maine

 Northeast Maine

Federal and state policy choices impact economic divide

In general, the Portland metro area is the most prosperous and economically dynamic part of the state. While this has been true for decades, **the gap between the Portland metro area and the rest of the state has widened significantly since 2001, due in part to federal and state responses to periods of recession.**

Between 2001 and 2023, the per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) of the Portland metro area increased 39% in inflation-adjusted terms. By contrast, the same measure for the regions of Maine with the least wealth — in the western and northeastern parts of the state — **remained essentially unchanged** (see Figure 1). As a result, the gap between the parts of the state with the most and least wealth almost **doubled**.

One explanation lies in the Great Recession of 2008 and its aftermath, which Maine experienced very differently across the state (see Figure 2). In the Portland metro area, the recession was relatively short-lived; by contrast, it lasted longer in other parts of the state.

This contrasts with the experience of Maine's different economies during the COVID-19 Recession. In the face of the biggest economic shock of a century, overall economic activity recovered quickly across the state — by 2023, it was 2% to 5% higher in most parts of Maine than 2019 levels after accounting for inflation. However, the disparity between Portland and the rest of the state continued to widen, as the Greater Portland area saw a 12% growth in GDP per capita over the same period.

Differing state and federal responses to each downturn help explain the story of these two recessions and their uneven geographic impacts. The administration of Governor Paul LePage prolonged the Great Recession by rejecting federal dollars,¹⁰ cutting back on spending and supports that would otherwise have boosted the economy.¹¹ Nationally, the response to the COVID-19 Recession was about **three times as large** as it was for the 2008-2009 recession and included more **direct relief to individuals** and **support for local and state governments**.¹² Meanwhile, before, during, and after the COVID recession, Governor Janet Mills' administration pursued federal funding and allocated COVID relief funds in ways that helped support Maine communities.

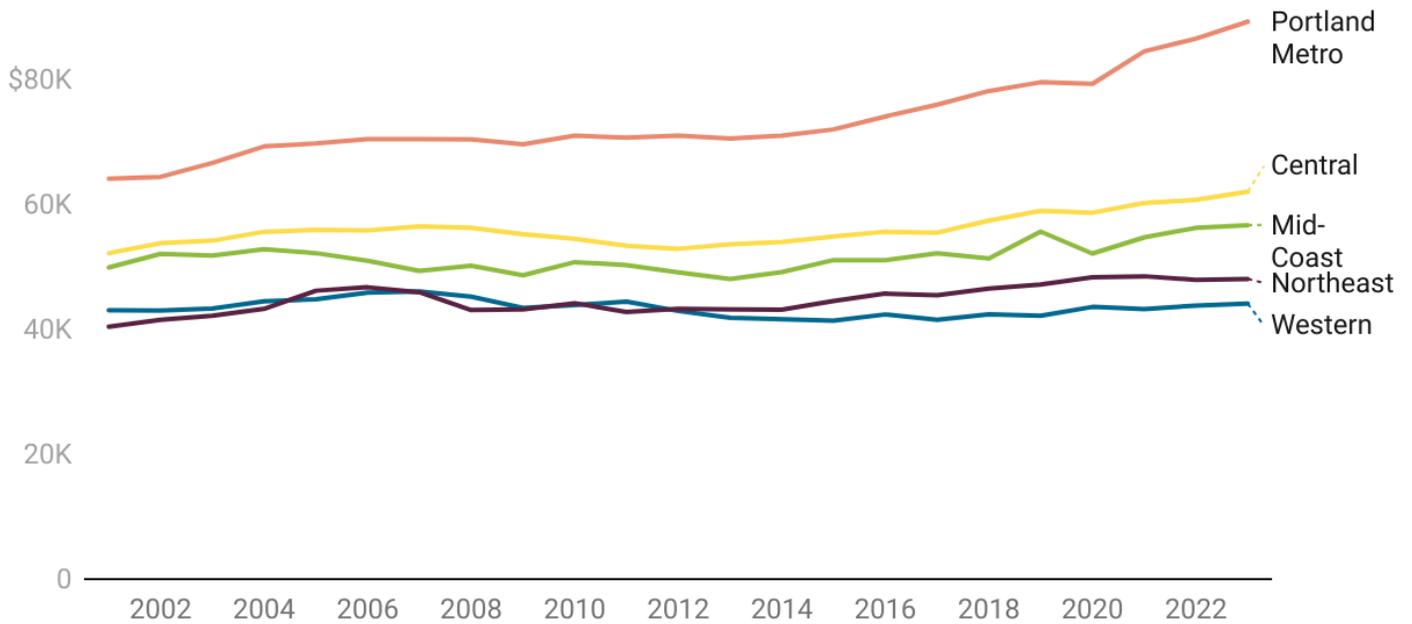
How long it took each Maine region to recover from the Great Recession

Region	Pre-Recession peak	Year of recovery	Number of years to recovery
Portland Metro	2006	2010	4
Central Maine	2007	2018	11
Mid-coast Maine	2004	2019	15
Northeast Maine	2006	2019	13
Western Maine	2007	Ongoing	16+

SOURCE: MECEP analysis of US Bureau of Economic Analysis, Gross Domestic Product data and US Census Bureau population estimates. Peak and recovery years measured by real GDP per capita.

Figure 1: The gap between Portland and other areas has grown

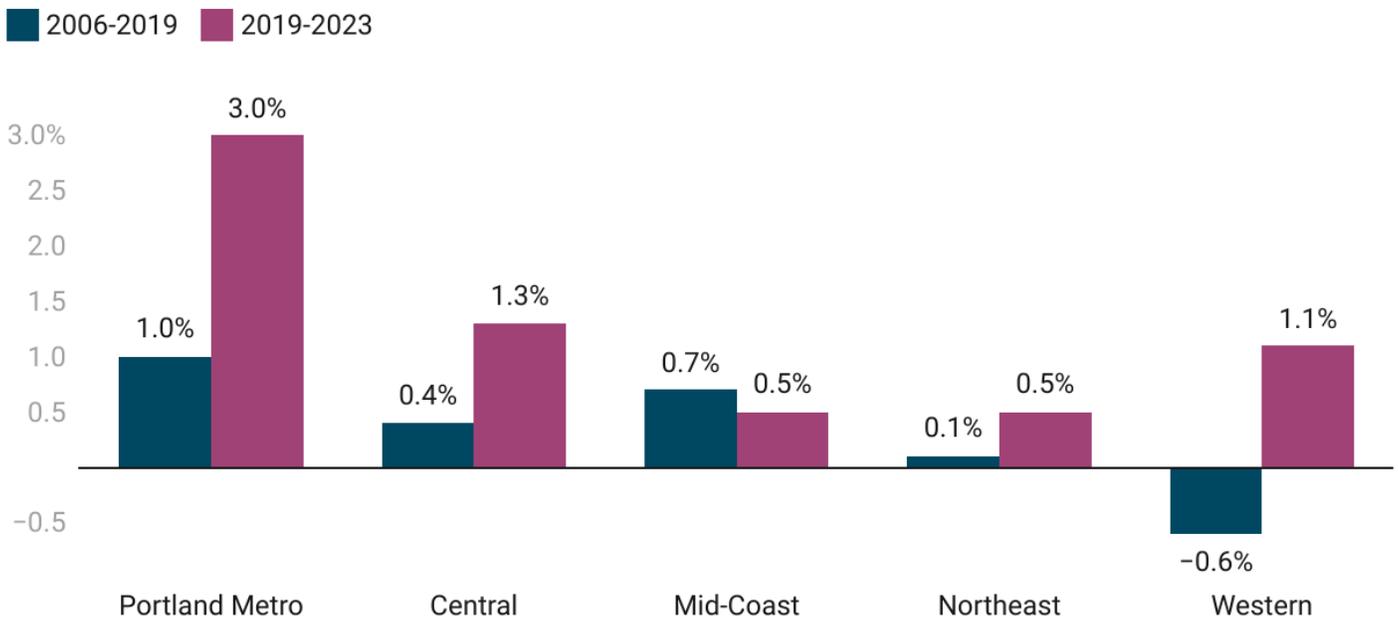
Change in real gross domestic product per capita, 2001-2023



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of US Bureau of Economic Analysis, Gross Domestic Product data, US Census Bureau, American Community Survey data and US Census Bureau county population estimates. Real GDP expressed in September 2025 dollars.

Figure 2: The COVID recovery was larger and more equitably distributed than that from the Great Recession

Average annual change in real GDP per capita

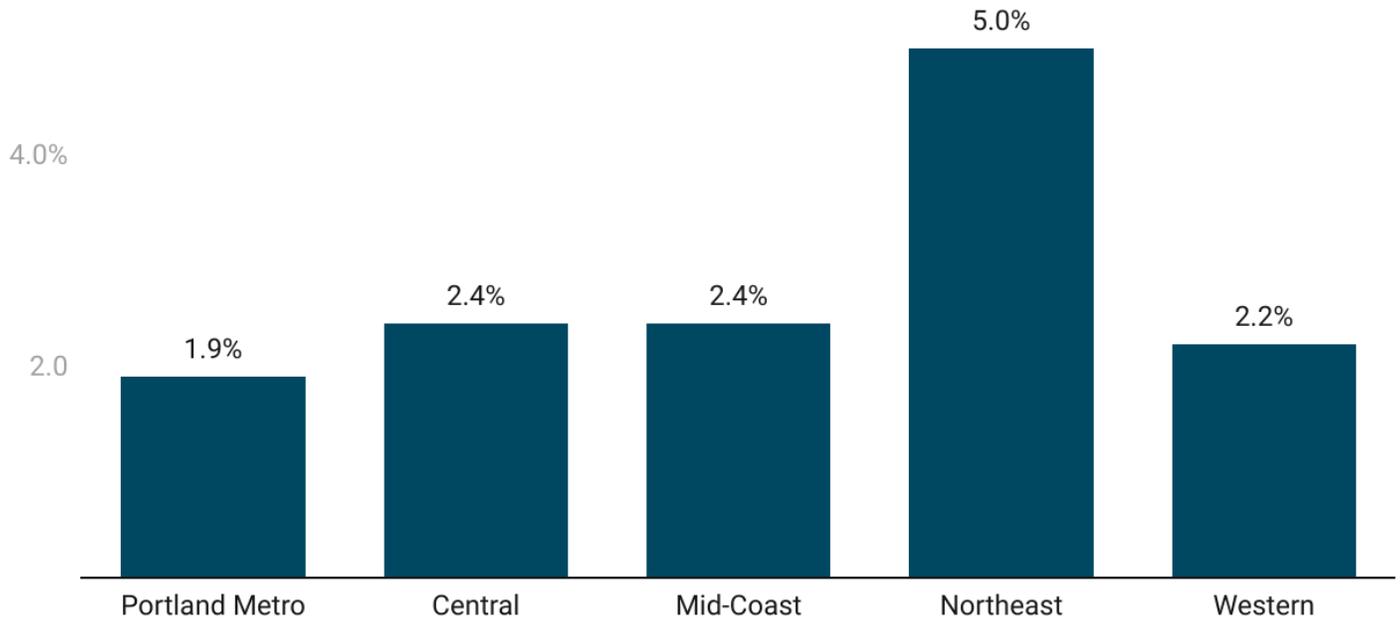


SOURCE: MECEP analysis of US Bureau of Economic Analysis, Gross Domestic Product data and US Census Bureau county population estimates.

This resulted in significant support for Maine’s more rural regions. Federal funding for COVID response and recovery funds accounted for a larger share of GDP in those regions than in the Greater Portland Metro region, helping to boost recovery efforts in more vulnerable areas (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Federal COVID funds were particularly impactful in Northeast Maine

Federal recovery spending as share of 2020-2023 GDP



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of USASpending.Gov, Maine Jobs Plan Investment Dashboard.¹³

In the words of workers:

“It sounds cliché, but when you dial it back to when things really changed in terms of the pace of life, the crazy inflation, how much we all have to work, and how tired we all are, COVID was the moment. I’m glad I was in Maine when it happened. There was enough space to breathe, literally and figuratively. You could get outside and get in nature and remind yourself that no matter what’s going on in the world at least we still have the earth under our feet and it’s beautiful here.”

- *Jesse, carpenter*

Despite improvements, poverty and unemployment are pervasive in parts of Maine

The weaker economy outside the Portland Metropolitan region has generally meant more Mainers living below the poverty line in other parts of the state. However, despite the lack of economic growth in these areas, **tens of thousands of Mainers have moved out of poverty across the state in the past decade.**

This success is due to both the strong labor market and the statewide minimum wage, which increased from \$7.50 per hour in 2016 to \$12 in 2020 and has grown by the cost of living each year since. This has helped ensure more equitable economic growth.

Nevertheless, people in the Northeastern and Western portions of the state are **twice as likely to live in poverty** as those in the Portland metro area outside the core cities (see Figure 4). This is partly because improved wages for workers have

driven a decline in poverty rates and the highest rate of employment is in the Portland metro area.¹⁴ Between 2014-16 and 2022-24, the number of working Mainers with incomes below the poverty level declined by 27%, while the share of Mainers below the poverty line who were not in the workforce remained essentially unchanged.¹⁵

In 2024, the monthly unemployment rate in the Portland metro region averaged 2.6%.¹⁶ In Northeastern Maine, it was **nearly twice as high** at 4.5%. Thanks to robust federal recovery efforts after the COVID-19 Recession, the labor market in 2024 was historically strong, and unemployment rates across the state were generally some of the lowest in decades. Nonetheless, the disparities between different regions of the state have been remarkably consistent over the past two decades. Whether in recession, recovery, or growth, unemployment is consistently higher outside the Portland metro area (see Figure 5).

In the words of workers:

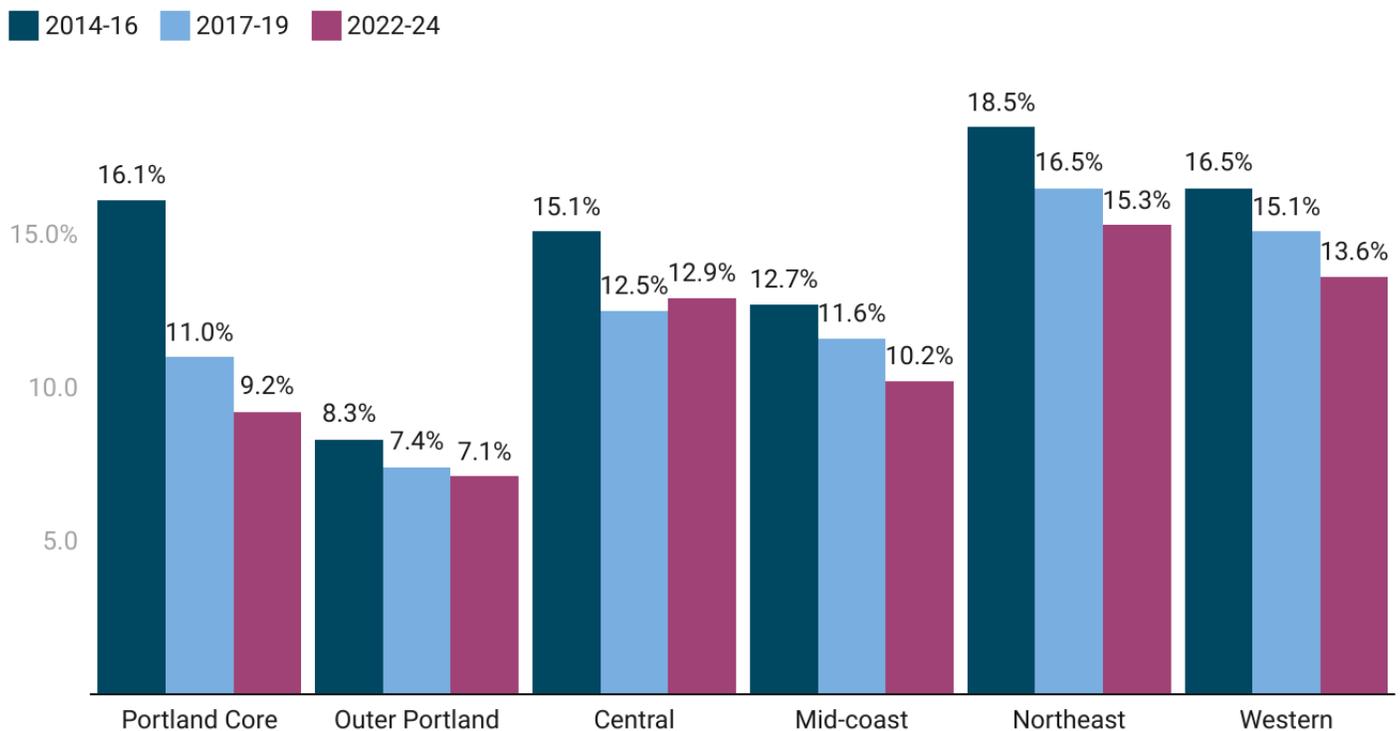
“The cost of living is just so high. ... People my age look at the wealth of the older generations and wonder how they’ll ever get there. ... It seems much harder to advance now.”

- *Chelsea, small business owner*

It is important that policymakers recognize both the impact of a strong labor market and its limitations, particularly as they consider ways to improve prosperity in the more rural parts of Maine.

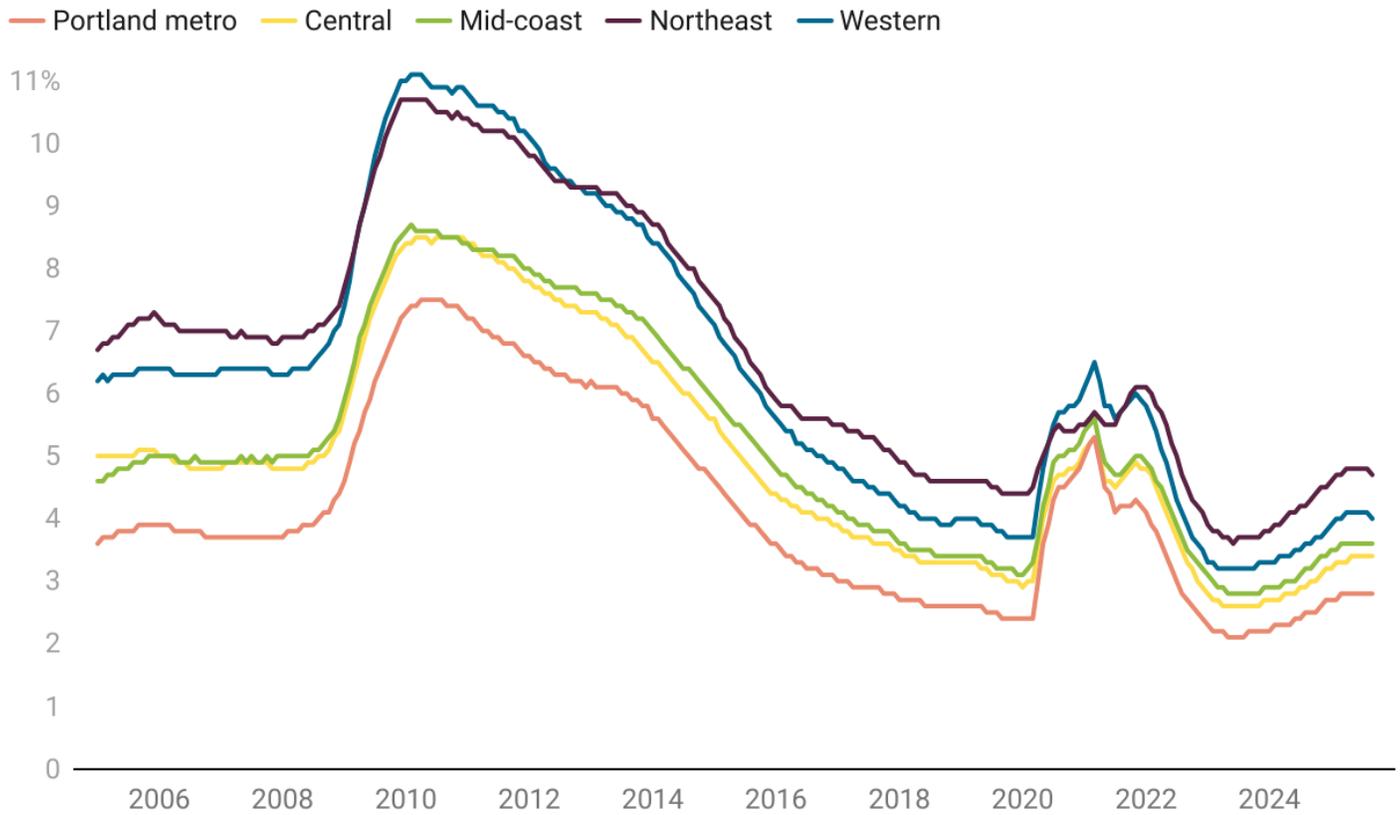
Figure 4: Poverty has improved, but less so in rural Maine

Share of population below the federal poverty level



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of US Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, American Community Survey data.

Figure 5: Unemployment is persistently higher outside the Portland metro area
Unemployment rate



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of Maine Department of Labor data. 12-month moving average.

The rural labor market

Access to good-paying jobs is foundational both for the strength of the economy and the wellbeing and fulfillment of individual Mainers. However, opportunities to work in these jobs vary greatly for Mainers depending on where they live.

Not only is unemployment higher outside the Portland metro region, but many Mainers in those regions don't count as unemployed because they aren't looking for work. Even among Mainers of "prime working age" (defined by economists as 25 to 54 years old), **labor force participation is lower in the more rural parts of the state** (see Figure 6).

Low labor force participation is both a symptom and a cause of economic stagnation. For employers, a lack of workers means trouble hiring staff. For individuals, being out of the labor force means a lack of income and financial hardship. At the same time, low labor force participation is often due to a lack of economic opportunity for workers. When the cost of care for children or older adults outpaces potential earnings, more Mainers — especially women — drop out of the workforce to meet those care obligations.¹⁷

More broadly, when Mainers don't feel like there are suitable jobs available for them, they stop looking entirely. This was illustrated in the aftermath of the recession of 2008-09, when labor force participation fell across the US, especially in the most economically

In the words of workers:

"I do think the majority of Mainers are workers. There's not a lot of sitting around. Most people around here have two or three different things they're doing. I think it's a rural Maine thing. But it would be interesting to ask people: if they had the money to cover all their bills, would they still have two or three jobs? I would guess people would say no."

- *Becky, small business owner*

In the words of workers:

"Child care is super duper expensive. I basically used my entire tax refund to pay for child care, and that wasn't enough. It was thousands of dollars for a couple months of care. My wife is now back at home because that's the more affordable option for us."

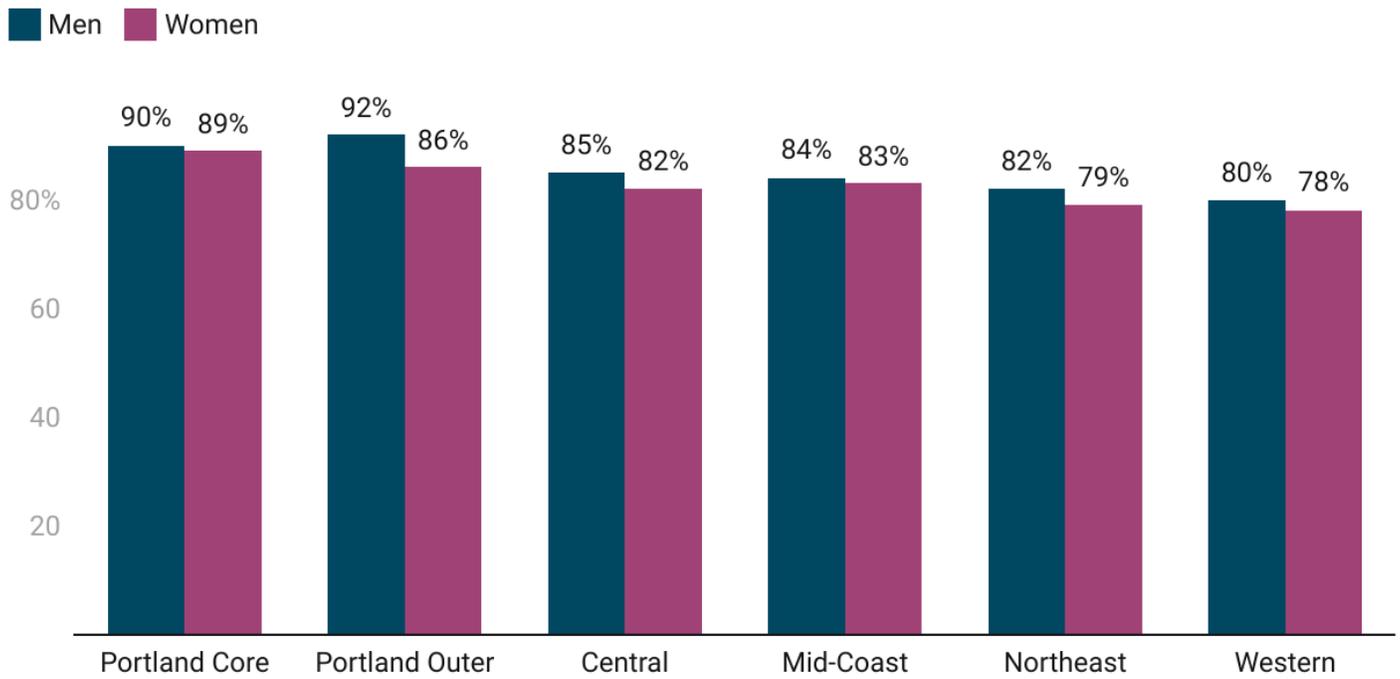
- *Jesse, carpenter*

depressed areas.¹⁸ While labor force participation in Maine has generally rebounded to pre-2008 levels, the lower rates in some parts of the state are likely because **the economies in these Maine regions were stagnant for longer**.

Health is an important contributor to labor force participation. Poor health is a major reason Mainers of prime working age say they aren't working or looking for work.¹⁹ At the same time, being out of work makes it harder to get health insurance and treat health problems.²⁰

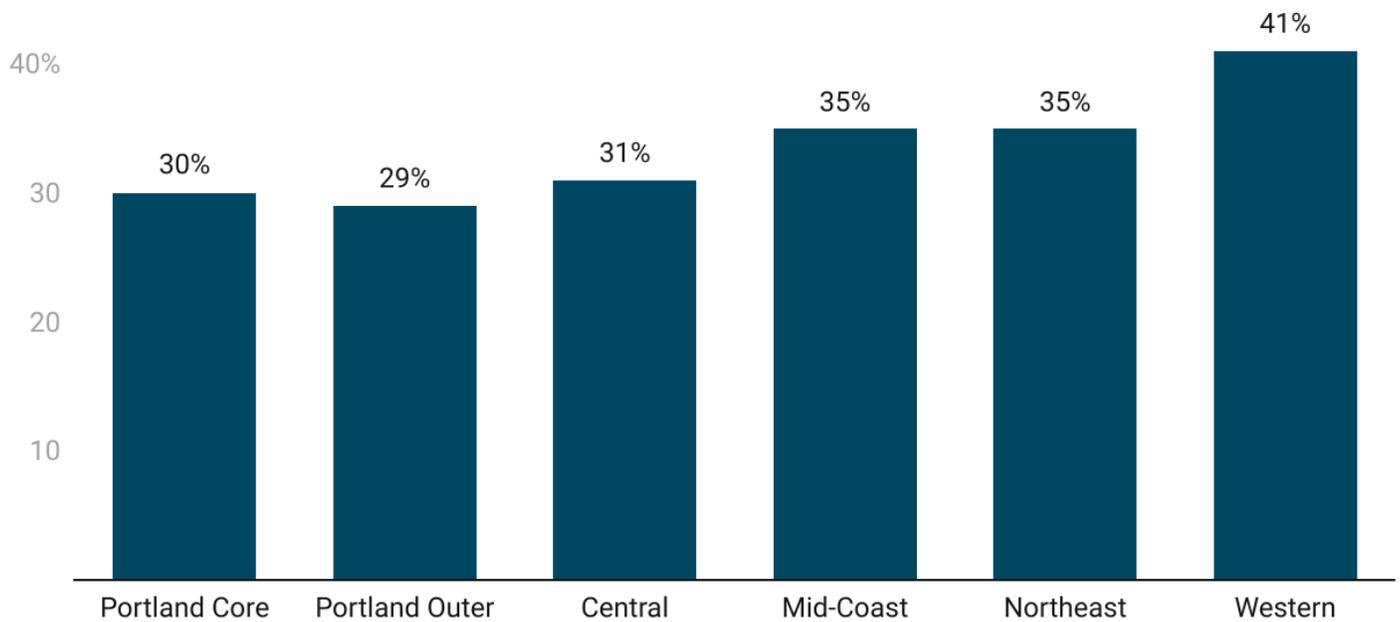
Because jobs in the most rural parts of the state are more likely to be part-time or seasonal (see Figure 7), Mainers there earn less each year, even if their hourly pay is the same. In addition to the financial cost, research shows inadequate work schedules lead to more stress for workers and worse overall mental health.²¹

Figure 6: Labor force participation among prime age Mainers lowest in rural Maine
 Labor force participation rates of 25-54 year-olds



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019-2023 data.

Figure 7: Rural Mainers are more likely to work part-time and seasonal jobs
 Share of 25-54 year-old workers who are working less than full-time, year-round jobs



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2024 data.

Wage gaps exist between regions and across race and gender lines

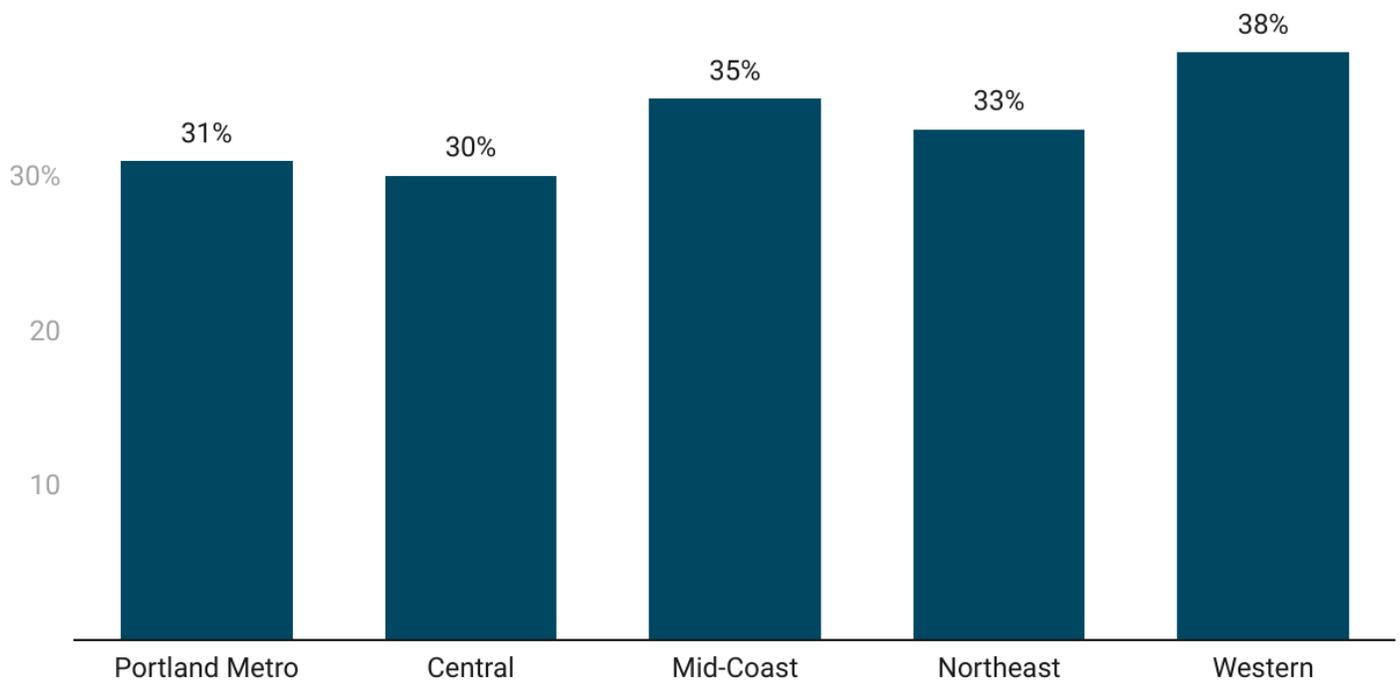
A living wage is foundational to economic security for Maine workers. However, **not only is work more scarce in the most rural parts of Maine, but wages are generally lower as well.** While in some ways the cost of living is lower in these areas (e.g. housing), those lower costs do not make up for lower wages. **Outside the Greater Portland and Central Maine areas, fewer workers earn a basic living wage** (see Figure 8).

Additionally, **wages earned by women in the more rural parts of the state are especially low** (see Figure 9). On average, between 2019-23, women working full-time, year-round jobs in Northeastern Maine earned just 71% of men in the same region. On the other hand, women in the Portland-South Portland-Westbrook urban core earned 87% of what men earned.

By contrast, **racial wage gaps are largest in the Portland metropolitan area** (see Figure 10). This may be partly because the most recent immigrants to Maine — who face language barriers as well as racial discrimination — live in the Portland Metro area.

Figure 8: Around a third of full-time workers in every region earn less than a living wage

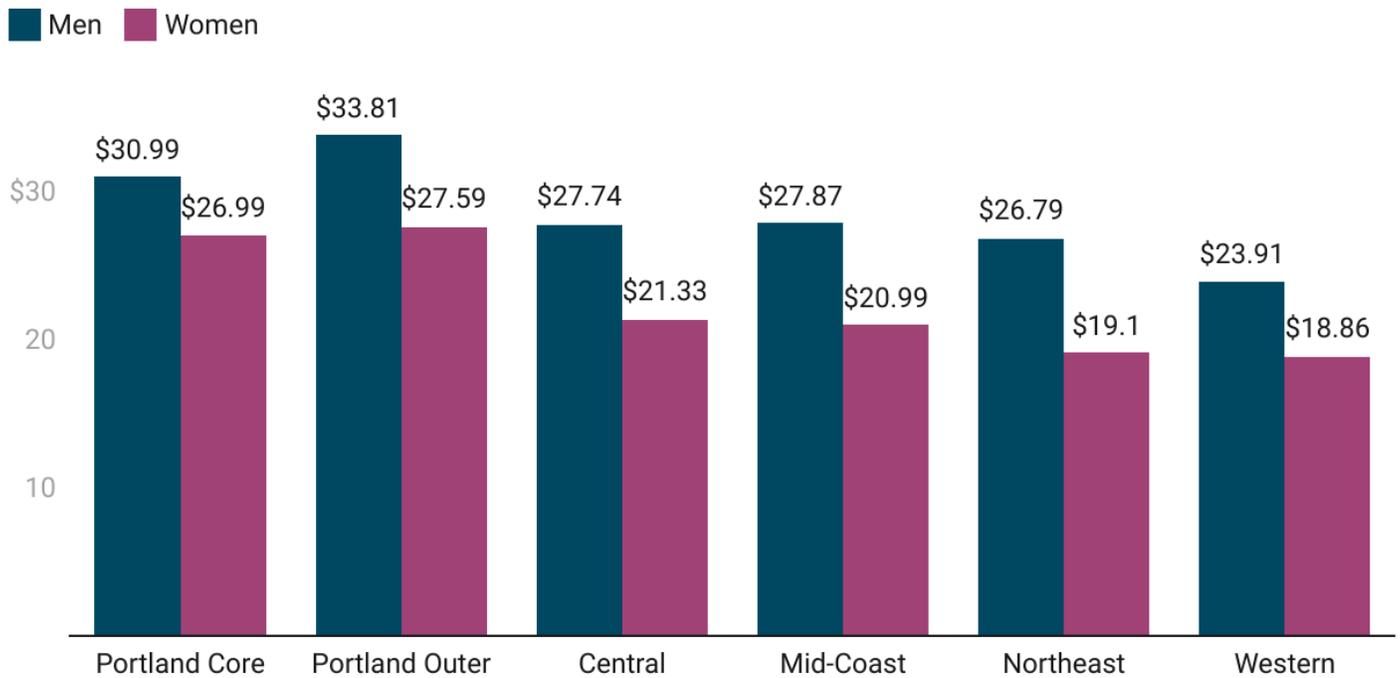
Share of full-time, year-round workers earning less than the living wage for a childless adult



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of MIT Living Wage calculator; US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2024 1-year data. Estimated share of full-time, year-round workers earning less than the living wage for a single adult without a child.

Figure 9: Gender wage gaps are largest in rural Maine

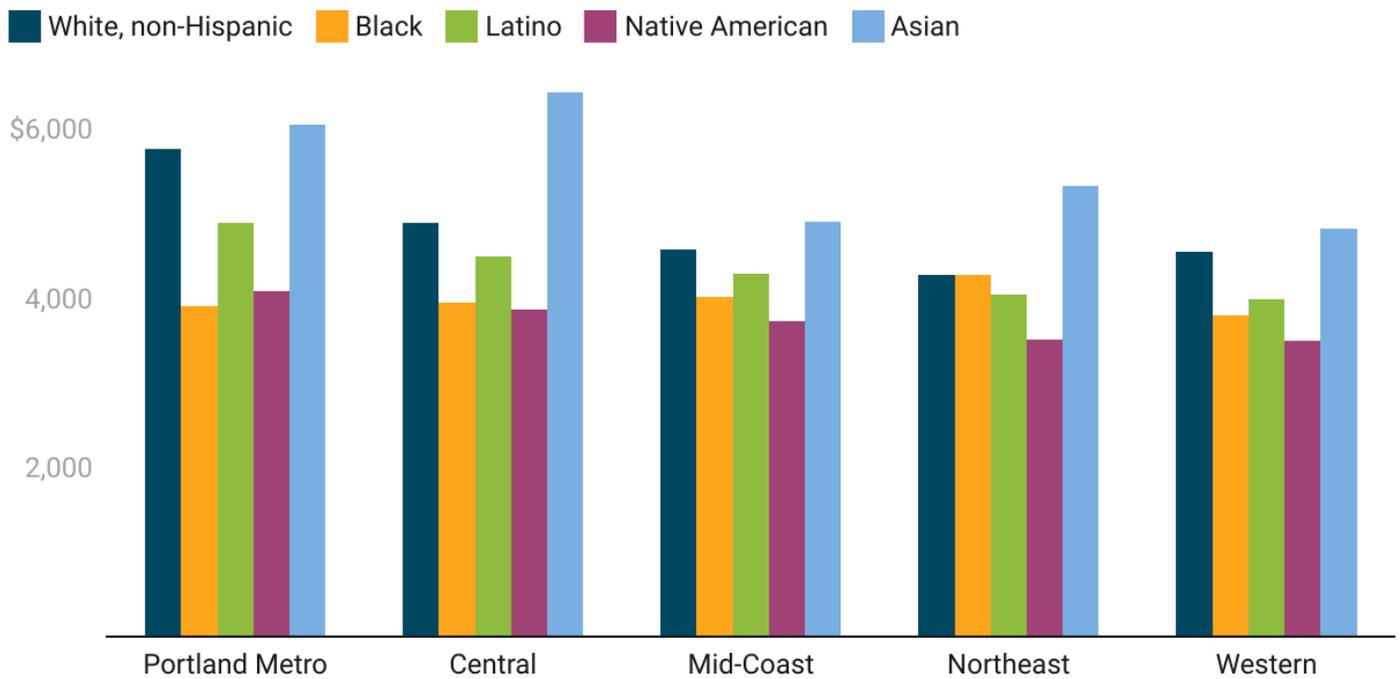
Median hourly wage for full-time, year-round workers



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019-2023 data.

Figure 10: Racial earnings gaps vary across the state

Average monthly earnings



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of US Census Bureau, Quarterly Workforce Indicators data. Monthly earnings for payroll employees averaged between Q4 2023 through Q3 2024.

Supporting rural workers means supporting self-employed workers and those in small businesses

Mainers working outside the Greater Portland and Central regions of the state are more likely to work for small employers, especially in Mid-Coast Maine, where there is also a higher share of workers who are self-employed (see Figures 11 and 12).

Working for a small employer or for oneself brings some advantages including greater flexibility, autonomy, and opportunities for advancement. On the other hand, **Mainers in these roles have less access to benefits such as paid time off or employer-sponsored health insurance.**

Lawmakers need to be aware of these differences when crafting public policy. By including carveouts for small employers in Maine's labor protections (e.g., earned paid leave), policymakers aim to reduce the administrative or economic burden on business owners. This ignores the ways these policies can help small businesses compete for workers and overlooks the harm it inflicts on workers. **In creating these carveouts, lawmakers are creating greater economic hardship for rural Mainers.**

In the words of workers:

"The biggest challenge of being a small business owner in a rural place is the inconsistency. We don't know what projects are going to be on our horizon from year to year. Material costs change constantly, so creating cost estimates for our clients is really hard. Running a small business is a way of life around here. There are so many of us who try to be creative and try to make it work, but a small business is not the same as a large corporation. The small business is working 90 times harder than that corporation."

- *Chelsea, small business owner*

In the words of workers:

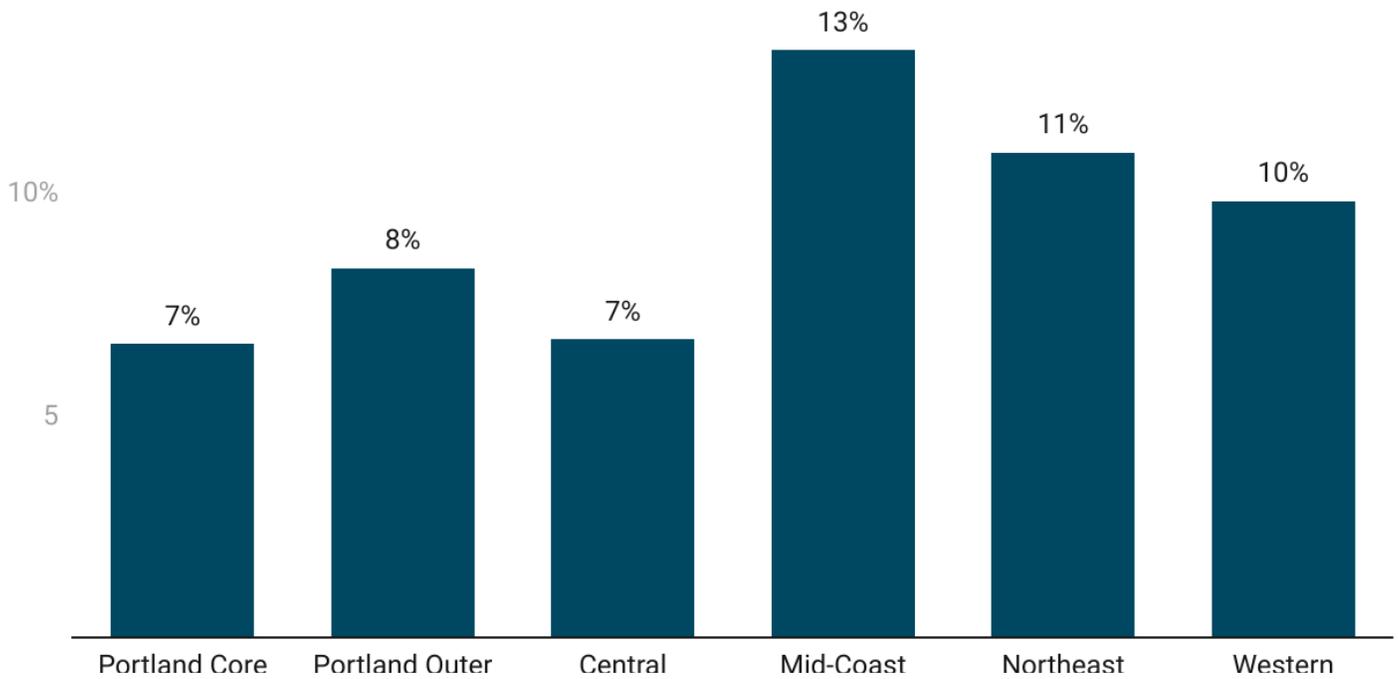
"We categorically decided we would not increase our prices, but we're really skating a fine line. We're getting creative with everything and trying to be as scrappy as possible. I'm optimistic about our future, but we're in this weird tariff land. There are so many unknowns."

- *Becky, small business owner*

Additionally, economic development strategies for rural areas often focus on attracting or retaining large employers through tax incentives. However, research consistently shows **such programs have little impact on employers' decisions to relocate.**²² Even statewide programs that do not target specific employers typically end up giving most of their benefits to large employers, who are better able to navigate program rules.²³ These programs **funnel money to the wealthier parts of the state that need the investment less, preventing better use of the funds.**

Figure 11: Mid-Coast Mainers are most likely to be self-employed

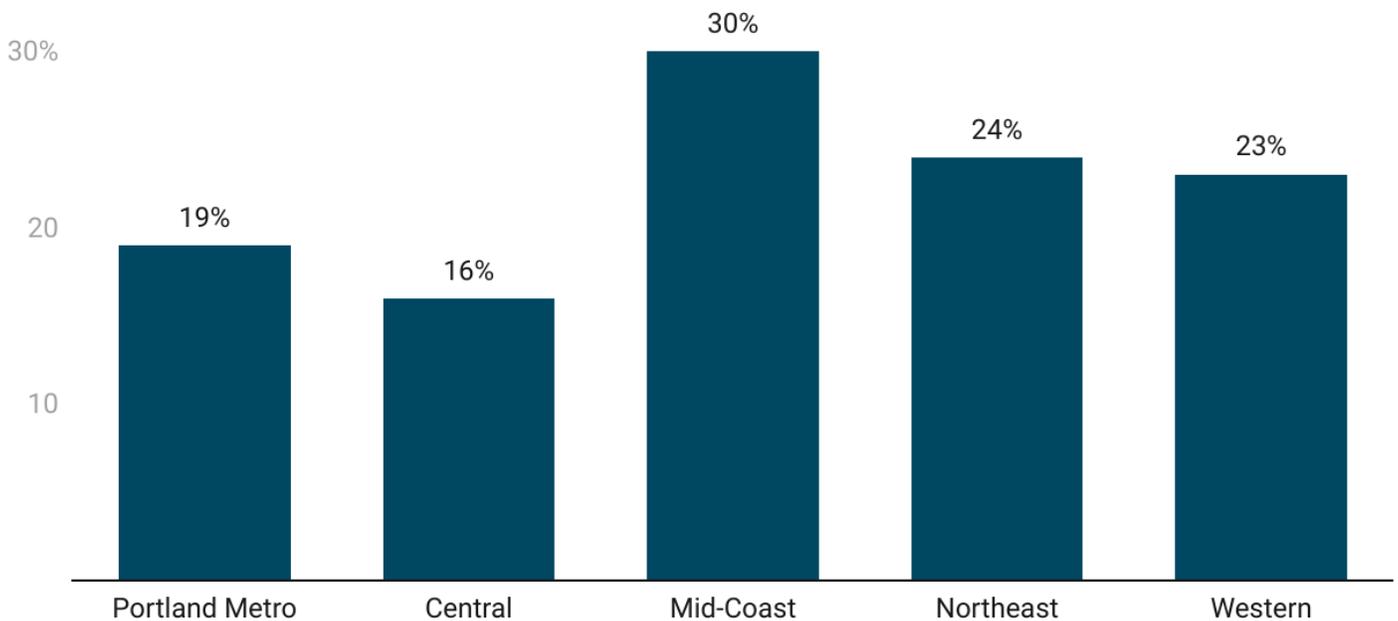
Share of workforce that is self-employed



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019-2023 data. Excludes workers in own incorporated businesses.

Figure 12: More Mainers work for small businesses in Mid-Coast, Western, and Northeastern Maine

Share of employees working at establishments with fewer than 10 employees



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of Maine Department of Labor, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Q1 2025 data.

Government as a rural employer

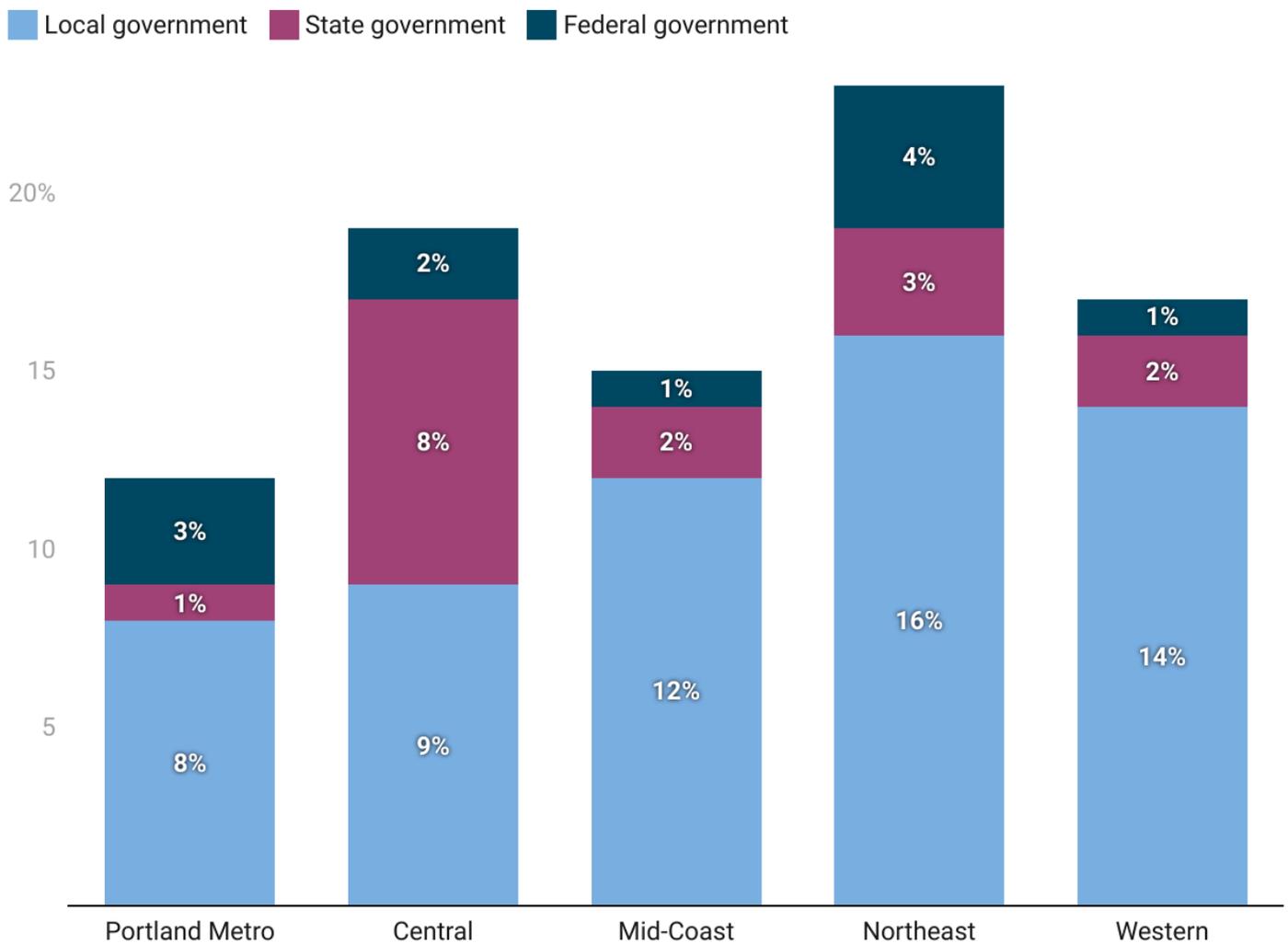
The federal government employs over 17,000 people in Maine, the State of Maine is the largest single employer in the state with 22,000 employees, and hundreds of municipal and county governments employ 61,000 people including teachers across Maine. Altogether, **public sector workers comprise a little under one in seven Maine workers**. Pay and working conditions for public sector workers therefore help to set standards for the entire workforce.

This is particularly true in Maine's more rural areas. Mainers outside the Greater Portland area are more likely to be public workers, especially in the Northeast and Central parts of the state (see Figure 13). **Despite multi-year efforts, state worker wages are still substantially below those of their private-sector peers in Maine.**²⁴ At the local level, compensation for public school teachers varies widely between school districts, with wealthier communities able to pay school staff more, and educators' wages overall lower than private sector options.²⁵

This means **in parts of the state where public sector work is more common, these pay gaps are making the economic gap between parts of Maine worse**. Supporting public sector workers is a necessary part of supporting "good jobs" in rural Maine.

Figure 13: Public sector employment is highest outside Portland and Mid-Coast areas

Employment as a share of all payroll employment



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of Maine Department of Labor, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages data. 2024 annual average employment.

Policy recommendations to support rural workers

Protect Maine's minimum wage. Maine's minimum wage has the greatest impact in the Northeastern and Western regions of the state, where otherwise wages would be even lower. State lawmakers should reject attempts to undermine minimum wage law and instead strengthen it by removing exemptions and by phasing out the tipped minimum wage.

Promote pay equity. State legislators can require employers to include wage information on job advertisements and pass legislation to require public reporting of existing wage gaps within companies.²⁶ Both policies would increase wages across the board and reduce disparities by race, age and gender. Institutions like the Maine Human Rights Commission and the Bureau of Labor Standards must have adequate staff and resources to enforce existing anti-discrimination laws.

Make care for children and older adults accessible and affordable. State lawmakers can improve labor force participation among prime-aged workers by improving access to care. Maine can build on recent successes to make child care more available and affordable by expanding scholarships and stipends for child care workers, while fully funding Maine's child care affordability program. Lawmakers can support Mainers whose adult family members need care by fully funding cost-of-living increases for care worker wages and, over the longer term, developing a comprehensive care subsidy for individuals.

Support public sector workers. State legislators should ensure all public workers receive fair pay. They must also ensure local governments, especially in communities with lower incomes, have sufficient state support to offer good wages to municipal workers and educators. Lawmakers should close the public sector pay gap so state worker wages and benefits are competitive with those of their private sector peers. They should support higher minimum pay for educators and support staff and ensure state funding to meet these goals so the cost does not fall disproportionately on rural communities.

State and federal support bolsters rural economies

Growing an economy requires two things: bringing new dollars into the economy and ensuring those dollars circulate locally for as long as possible. For rural Maine, state and federal government play an outsized role in doing both.

Maine is a net recipient of federal funding, meaning we receive substantially more in federal resources than we pay in federal taxes. In 2023, Mainers received \$12.8 billion more in federal support than they contributed, with the average Mainer paying \$10,400 in federal taxes and receiving \$19,500 in federal benefits.²⁷ Federal funding accounts for roughly one-fifth of Maine's gross domestic product and approximately one-third of the state budget.²⁸

State government then directs these federal dollars — along with state-raised revenue — across the state, effectively redistributing resources from higher-income regions such as Greater Portland to rural and less prosperous parts of Maine. These public investments are a major source of economic activity in many rural communities, supporting local jobs, sustaining consumer spending, and stabilizing regional economies.

Unemployment insurance stabilizes rural Maine's seasonal labor market

Given the high rate of unemployment and seasonal unemployment in Maine's more rural areas, **the unemployment insurance (UI) program is an important lifeline for rural workers and for the rural economy in general.** This was particularly pronounced during the worst of COVID, when the federal government provided longer and more generous unemployment benefits to individuals who could not return to work due to the pandemic.

During the period when enhanced federal benefits were available, Mainers in rural areas were much more likely to use the UI program than those in the

A large share of state and federal spending flows through programs such as Social Security, MaineCare (Medicaid), and SNAP. In federal fiscal year 2025, these programs brought nearly \$8 billion in Social Security payments, \$3.5 billion in health care services, and \$291 million in food assistance into Maine's economy.²⁹ In rural areas especially, these dollars circulate through local businesses, health care providers, and service systems, multiplying their economic impact.

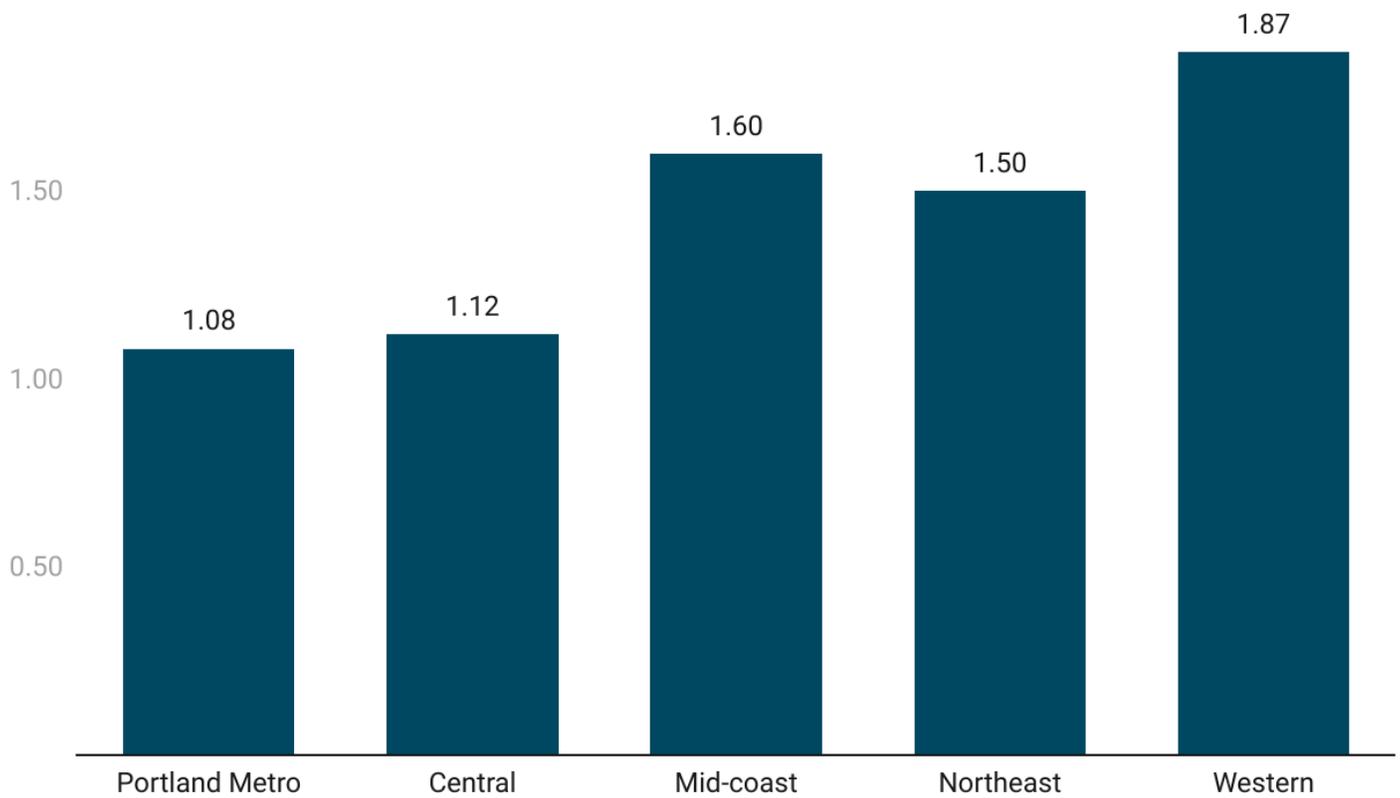
As this report shows, **policy choices made by state and federal lawmakers can either strengthen these economic engines or weaken them.** They can also strip away opportunity and economic security for the people who live there or bolster their current and future stability. Recent federal actions—including funding rescissions, impoundments, and the 2025 reconciliation bill—threaten to pull hundreds of millions of dollars out of Maine's economy each year,³⁰ disproportionately affecting rural communities by reducing the flow and local retention of public dollars and hurting the future prospects of the people who live there by undercutting critical supports during times of economic hardship.

Greater Portland Area (see Figure 14). The end of enhanced pandemic unemployment benefits and the recovery of the labor market have greatly reduced participation in the UI program. Nonetheless, more people in rural parts of Maine use the program.

Unfortunately, **the safety net the UI system provides is inadequate for most workers, and in a typical year only one-quarter of unemployed workers can claim the benefit.** Lawmakers can modernize and strengthen the program so it provides adequate benefits for Mainers who lose their jobs.

Figure 14: Pandemic unemployment insurance stabilized rural Maine

Number of weekly unemployment claims per worker, June 2020 to August 2021



SOURCE: Data from Maine Department of Labor. Ratio of total weekly unemployment claims as a share of the 2019 payroll workforce.

Food assistance helps rural economies

Food is one of the most fundamental human needs, yet **almost 200,000 Mainers either don't have enough to eat or can't consistently afford a healthy, nutritious diet.**³¹ Higher rates of poverty in the most remote parts of Maine lead to more Mainers suffering from food insecurity in those areas. While poverty has generally declined in Maine in recent years (see Figure 4), food insecurity has been increasing (see Figure 15).

This may be partly because recently the cost of food has increased faster than the overall cost of living. Between 2019 and 2024, the overall Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 23% while the CPI for food at home rose by 27%.³²

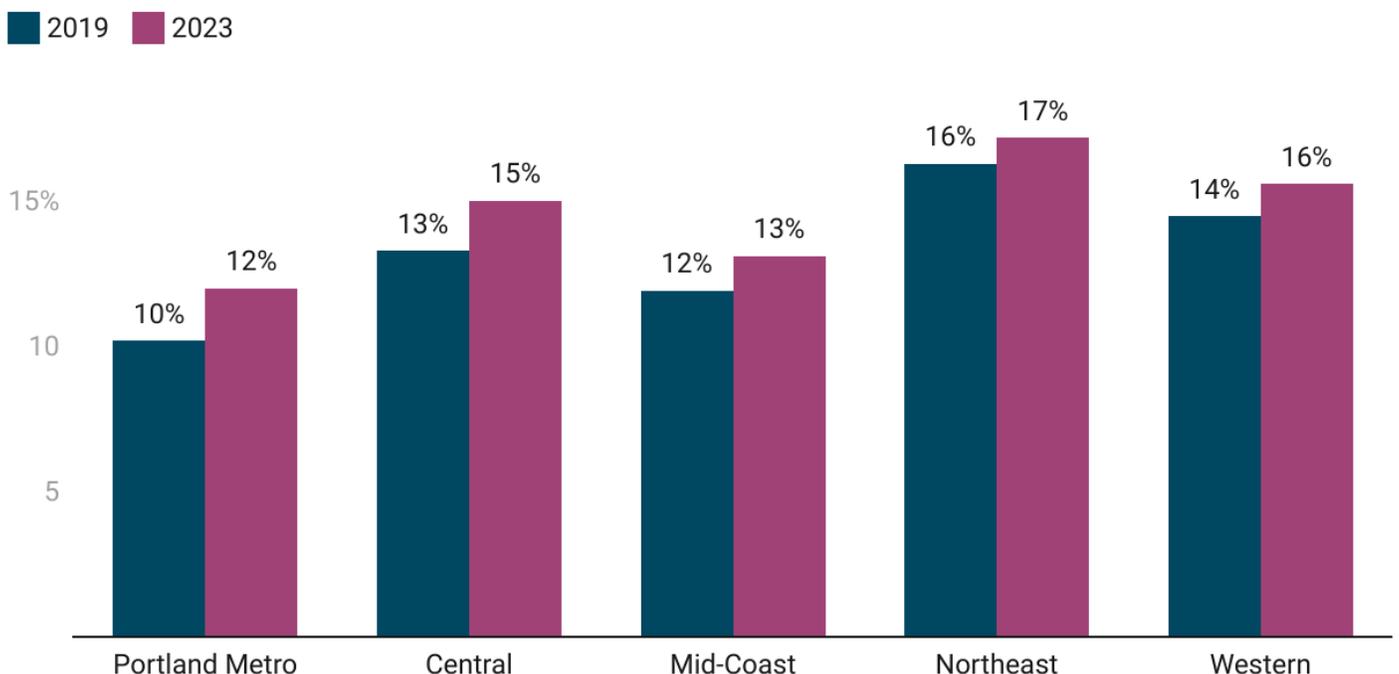
Federally funded SNAP is the major tool against food insecurity. Research finds participation in the program reduces the likelihood of being food insecure by almost one-third.³³ SNAP participation is highest in the regions of Maine with the greatest rates of food insecurity, which not only helps to fight hunger in these areas but also acts as an important part of the local economy. Every dollar in federally funded SNAP benefits generates approximately

\$1.50 for regional economies.³⁴ This multiplier effect is especially important in some areas of Maine — SNAP's share of economic activity in Northeast and Western Maine was five times greater than in the Portland Metro area in 2023 (see Figure 16).

Restricting SNAP participation harms Mainers and their local economies. The recent history of Maine's SNAP program shows how decisions made in Augusta perpetuate food insecurity and hardship in rural areas. In 2014, Governor Paul LePage discontinued the use of waivers from the federal work reporting requirement for SNAP in areas of high unemployment. This meant more people in Maine's rural regions were unable to meet the newly reinstated work requirement given the elevated levels of unemployment. As a result, the share of vulnerable people eligible for SNAP fell most significantly in those regions of the state, likely prolonging the economic recession there. Governor Janet Mills reinstated the waivers for some areas of the state that qualified in 2019. As a result, the share of vulnerable people who qualify for food stamps has rebounded in the last few years (see Figure 17).

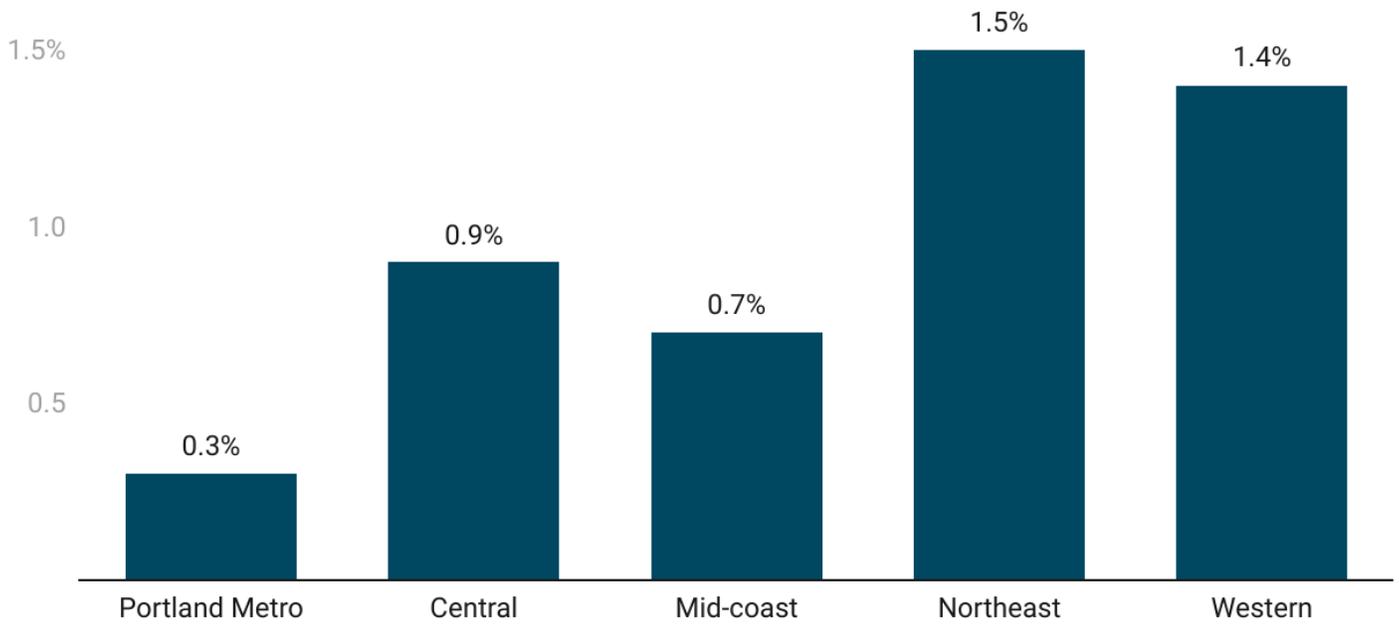
Figure 15: Food insecurity is rising everywhere and is highest outside Portland

Share of Mainers who are food insecure



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of Feeding America estimates.

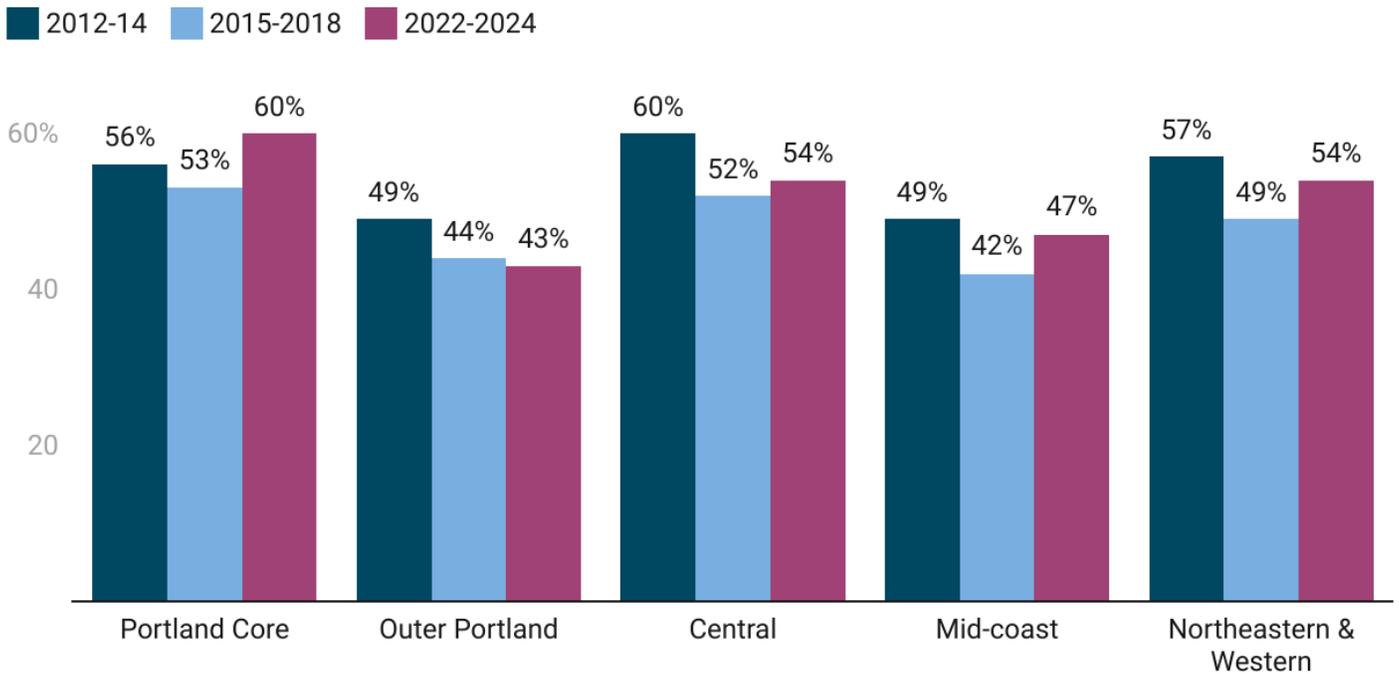
Figure 16: SNAP has extra economic importance in Western and Northeast Maine
SNAP multiplier as share of GDP



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Family Independence data, 2023 total annual SNAP spending, and US Bureau of Economic Analysis Gross Domestic Product 2023 data.

Figure 17: Changes to SNAP policy meant less help getting to Mainers with low income

SNAP recipients as a share of Mainers with income below 200% of the federal poverty level



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Family Independence data and US Census Bureau, American Community Survey data.

Mainers speak on food access and community



Jamie works at the Belfast Community Co-op, a 49-year-old independent, member-owned grocery in Belfast. When we spoke with him in October, the Trump administration had just announced it was planning to withhold SNAP funding during the federal government shutdown.

Every month about \$25,000 in SNAP EBT transactions happen at our store. Every dollar spent in SNAP equals about \$1.54 in estimated local activity.

Regardless of what your politics are, when money turns around and puts more money in the economy – that’s a slam dunk. So do that math — the \$25,000 we’re not helping move out into the community could be a net of \$38,000 of economic activity that’s lost in our region.

It’s a huge ripple effect. The food comes from a distributed network of people, from the stocker in the grocery store to the truck driver delivering it

to the farmers who grew it and their farmworkers who are probably on SNAP. It’s an economy, just like everything else. **It takes a lot of money to make food happen, and all of it is done on a razor-thin margin. It’s not just free money coming out of nowhere going nowhere. All of these dollars touch lives.**

The support networks that help connect people with food, like Good Shepherd Food Bank and Waldo County Bounty, are telling us people are needing more and there are less resources to help. **It’s really challenging, and the lack of communication and clear vision causes a lot of chaos and stress. We’re wasting a lot of time just trying to navigate these challenges, and wasting time means we’re not doing other good and useful things.** We’re just trying to navigate bureaucracy now.

It’s an increasingly harder space to be in, as an independent grocery store. Once upon a time, Belfast had about seven different, independently owned corner grocery stores. Now that number is about half what it was. **Most of the economic engine is going into one company: Hannaford, a multinational based in the Netherlands. While their profits are benefiting shareholders overseas, independent grocers are all local businesses.** Our members, our workers, our board of directors all live locally, shop locally, and keep their money circulating in the local economy.

Oftentimes, people are just looking at the cheapest item available, and that’s the only metric they’re using. **The reality is: there is no cheap food. Somebody’s paying a price at some point along the way,** whether it’s the environment that’s taking the hit, or workers in another country getting a substandard wage, or workers at the Dollar General who are underpaid and undervalued. If you only look at what you pay at the end, you’re not seeing the whole picture.

We’re a rural community, so services are harder to get to, and that requires a lot more travel or less choices. Everything is usually just a little more complicated. **We’ve had a big influx of people since COVID. On one hand, it’s fantastic because Maine needs new people. The more economic activity**

in Maine, the better. But on the other, it's driven property values sky high. The housing crisis, which was already a thing, is even more difficult now. And though our business is actually doing really well, we still need great workers. And if workers don't have anywhere affordable to live, that affects everything else.

Maine can be a challenging place to live. We all choose to live here because of so many wonderful things, but many of us have chosen to do with less.

We have less access to some services and resources, but greater access to the beauty and the splendor and all that good stuff. Some people move here and think they can get a one-for-one big city experience, when in reality it's a give and take. That's one thing that's great about Mainers in general. We do more with what we have. **Let's all get together to make this work for everybody, because that's what Mainers are doing.**



Tracey started the East Madison Food Project, a volunteer-run hyper-local community food distribution effort, in May.

We give out about 30 boxes of food each month from our local grange. **We ask no questions. If someone walks in, we hand them a box of food until the food is gone.** We also try to let people know that between distribution days, if someone is in a pinch, they can get hold of us and we will find some food. There are a few people we drive the food to, because they don't have a vehicle or they can't get to the grange on the distribution day.

When I first started this project people said, "You want to serve East Madison? That community doesn't need help." Well, not really. **If you lived there, you would see it. The whole area is very scrappy and self-sufficient, but things just keep getting that much harder all the time.**

The average rent in Madison is about \$900 a month. And this is a place where there aren't all that many options, either. **I know people who try to get through the winter living in campers.** Somerset County has [one of the highest] poverty levels in Maine. So, if you're starting from there, and looking at things getting worse, that's a bleak picture. **For a lot of people in our community, there is nothing there for them when the bottom falls out.**

I'm hoping next year we can do even more. **With all the changes coming to SNAP, I think there's going to be a bigger need for local mutual aid projects like this. I do worry for people. Who knows what's going to happen if people lose their health insurance?** I find it hard to think about what's happening and what the future looks like. I don't think it's going to be an easy one for a lot of people.

State and federal programs make rural health care more accessible

Health and economic security are intertwined. **Mainers with lower incomes, who are disproportionately likely to live in the most rural regions, are more likely to suffer from health conditions.** This is partly due to their work. For example, while only 2% of Mainers work in agriculture, fishing, and logging,³⁵ these dangerous occupations are more common among Mainers in Western and Northeastern Maine. Americans working in farming, fishing, and forestry occupations are almost seven times as likely to suffer a fatal workplace injury.³⁶ Even less hazardous work in low wage service work can lead to higher instances of conditions like back pain,³⁷ and higher mortality rates.³⁸

Living without adequate financial resources causes additional health strain. Food insecurity leads to malnutrition and can exacerbate problems such as diabetes and high blood pressure. The unaffordability of health care itself means conditions go undiagnosed and untreated for longer. **As a result, there is substantial variation in life expectancy between Mainers living in different parts of the state.** Residents of Sagadahoc County have an average life expectancy at birth of 79.9 years, while those in Washington County can expect to live 72.3 years.³⁹

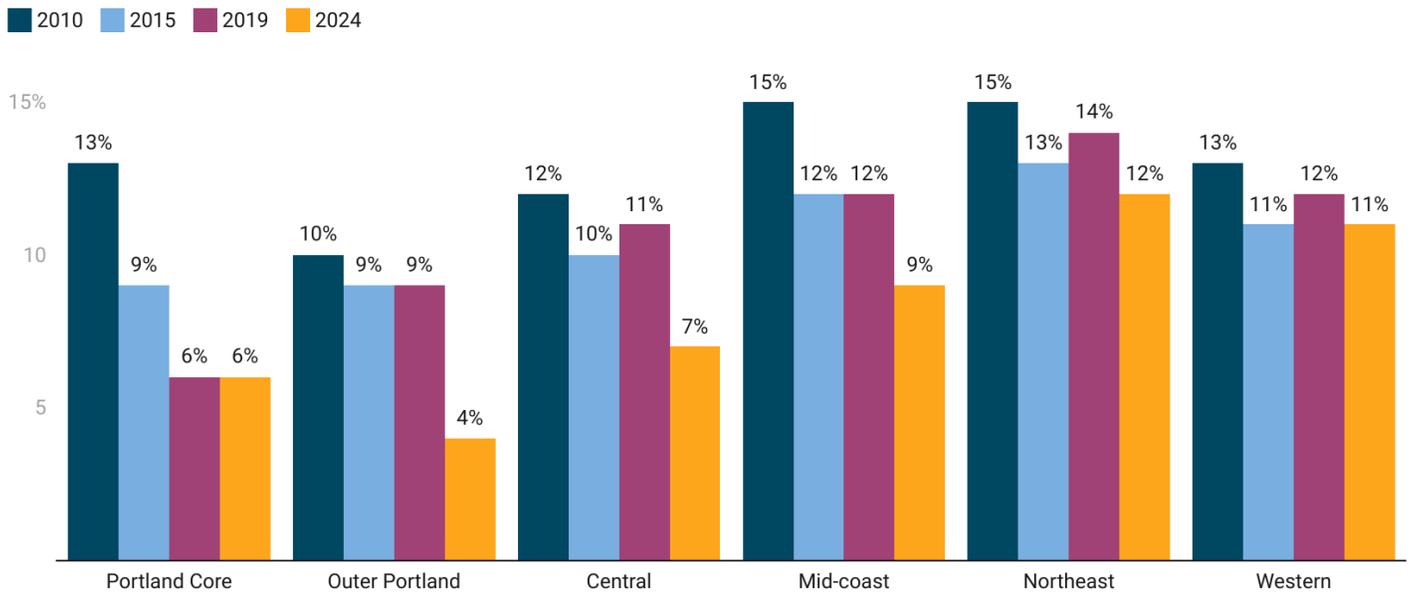
Cost burdens are greater for Mainers in rural areas through a legalized form of price discrimination that allows health insurers to charge Mainers in these areas higher premiums based on where they live, rather than spreading risk throughout the state.

Since Congress passed the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2010, more Mainers across the state have access to health insurance (see Figure 18). Subsidies for individual health insurance plans through the ACA's marketplace (known as CoverME in Maine) have been particularly impactful in the Mid-Coast and Northeastern parts of the state (see Figure 19), while the expansion of Medicaid eligibility in Maine since 2019 has been especially helpful to Mainers in the Northeastern and Western regions (see Figure 20).⁴⁰ These programs help fill the gaps left by a lack of employer-sponsored health care for self-employed Mainers and workers in small businesses, and help Mainers in or near poverty to get health care, respectively.

Despite these improvements, **a larger share of Mainers under the age of 65 is uninsured in the more rural parts of the state.** This may be because, even with premium subsidies, insurance remains too expensive for many Mainers.

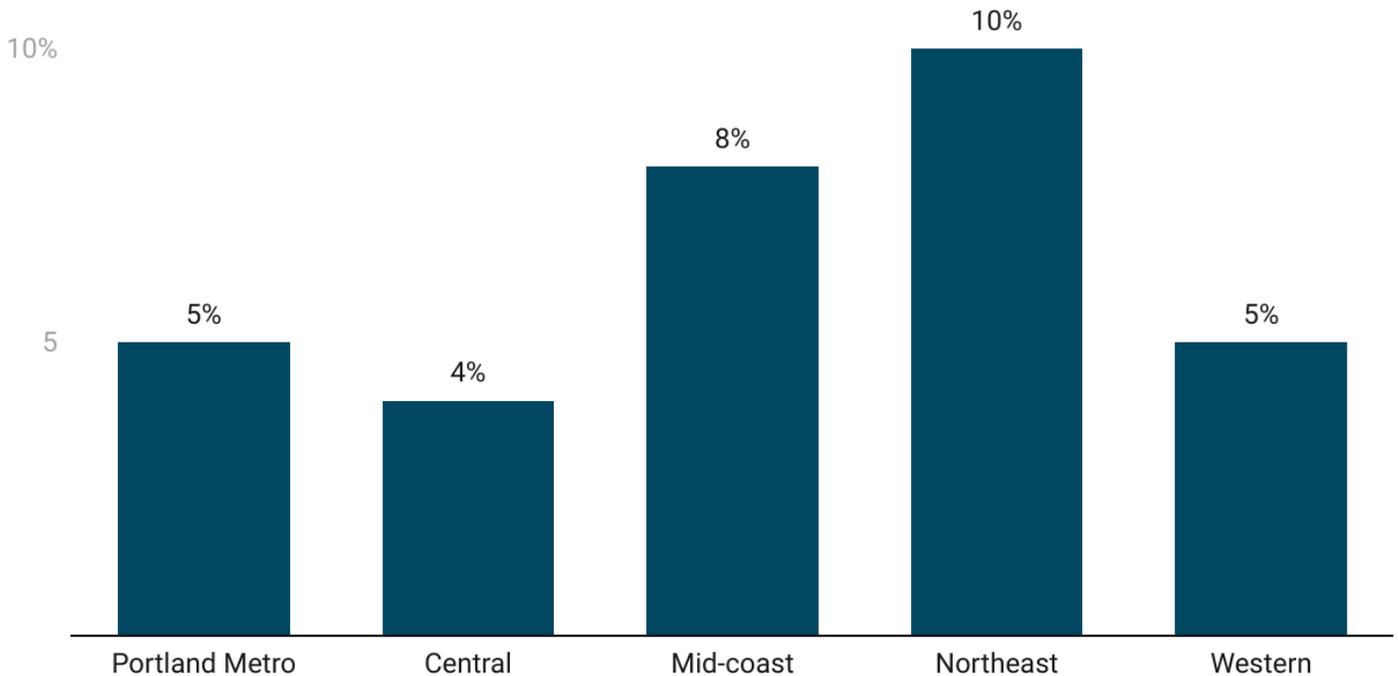
Figure 18: The Affordable Care Act has improved insurance rates across Maine, but less in the Northeast and Western regions

Share of population under age 65 without health insurance



SOURCE: MECEP's analysis of Census Bureau Small Area Health Insurance Estimates (for years 2010-2019) and American Community Survey for 2024.

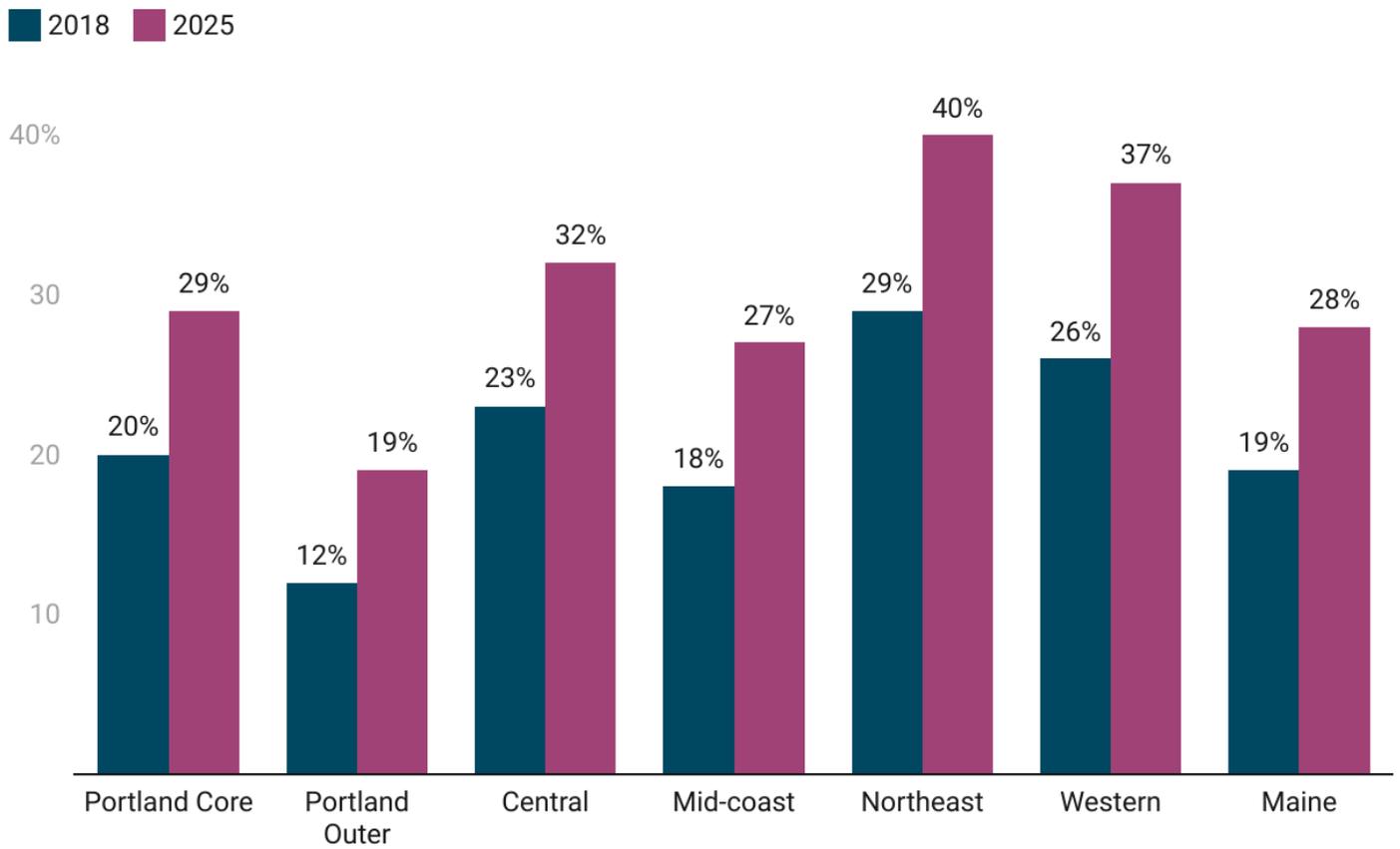
Figure 19: Mid-Coast, Northeast use Affordable Care Act marketplace insurance most
CoverME.gov enrollment as a share of under-65 population



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of CoverME.gov open enrollment data for plan year 2025. Population data from US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2024 data.

Figure 20: Recent expansions of MaineCare have been especially impactful in Northeast and Western Maine

Share of population enrolled in MaineCare



SOURCE: MECEP analysis of data from Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Family Independence. Enrollment numbers for July of each year. Population counts from US Census Bureau. 2025 numbers use 2024 population data.

What Maine workers have to say about health care

“Right now, I’m trying to figure out how much more my health insurance costs are going to be. As a real estate agent, an independent contractor, it is impossible to project next year’s income. It’s the dumbest thing ever. Because if you underestimate, you have to pay back the tax credits you get. **One year I was way off, and I paid an exorbitant amount. I had to get on a payment plan. And with these high deductibles it’s even worse. It took me five years to pay off my daughter’s birth!**

I’m nervous about what next year’s plan is going to look like. If it’s more than \$550 a month, we won’t be able to do it. I just have no idea how my income is going to play out for next year. In trying to get the clothing line off the ground, my real estate income has taken a hit. And with the tariffs, it’s been harder to build the clothing line the way I planned. So it’s impossible to project.”

— **Becky, small business owner**

“Health care is completely unaffordable, and it’s the one thing I could cut out of my monthly budget. We can’t go without food. We can’t go without heat or electricity. So I am just going to take the risk. I don’t think that’s uncommon in the trades. But it feels really unstable for me, and kind of scary. My new employer does offer health insurance plans, but they don’t pay as much towards the plans as my previous employer. You might as well not have insurance at all because the deductible is so high. That’s like \$4,000 a year just to be in the club. And if I chop my finger off on the table saw, the deductibles and co-insurance costs are so high — how do I pay for that? Honestly, I’d rather have that \$4,000 to put towards my credit card, because that’s how I’m going to be paying for the health care anyway. I need that money paycheck to paycheck.”

— **Jesse, carpenter**

“Mental health is a big concern for my generation. I wish people were more understanding about that, and how serious it actually is. It’s not a joke. **I’ve struggled with mental health problems.** Most of my friends struggle with mental health problems. I don’t know how to fix that, but **just making it easier and more affordable to get care would take a lot of stress off those who aren’t blessed to be in a wealthy family.**”

— **Abbey, student and part-time mechanic**

“At 80 workers, our business is a size that’s required to provide health insurance. Every year, it’s a new challenge to figure out what we can do. We always have to budget for an increase, while expecting to get less options for our workers. It gets worse and worse every year with less services being provided to the end user. It definitely hits our bottom line and hits individuals hard. Every year it’s such a disappointing conversation, and one we don’t want to have. The options are so limited. No one’s needs are being met. **What it comes down to is: who is benefiting here? I think it’s the large corporations getting the money, not the individuals that need care, and not the businesses trying to provide a safe and healthy work environment.** Who’s winning? Not the regular folks.”

— **Jamie, grocery store manager**

“My husband and I buy our own health insurance through the marketplace. The cost is going up 10% next year. It’s very stressful. I just don’t know how I’m going to figure that out. It’s tough when you work so hard, to be paying all that money into a system that you don’t know if you are even going to use. **It just doesn’t make any sense that I have to pay so much out of pocket before they’ll even start paying for anything we’ve had done. They’re making a lot of money. It’s just wrong.** We have to keep stepping things up in a way that never gives us a break because we’re always having to make more money to pay this stupid new health insurance bill.”

— **Jane, small business owner**

“Turning 26 and having to pay for my own health insurance was really scary. You don’t think about health care until you’re the one who has to pay for it. I went a few years without health insurance because it was just too expensive. **Last year I didn’t qualify for MaineCare so I didn’t have insurance, but this year I did. It’s hard, because we never know what we’re going to make year to year.**”

— **Chelsea, small business owner**

Policy recommendations to strengthen the safety net for rural Mainers

Ensure non-working Mainers aren't left behind. Federal and state lawmakers should expand existing anti-poverty programs like the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and state-level Dependent Exemption Tax Credit.

Protect and strengthen Social Security. Federal lawmakers must ensure inadequate retirement support does not trap older Mainers in poverty. This means increasing monthly Social Security retirement payments for retirees with the lowest income.

Protect crucial federal funding. Maine's Congressional delegation should work to undo harmful cuts to programs such as SNAP and Medicaid and oppose the recission or impoundment of other funds, which are critical to supporting the economy of Maine's most remote areas.

Improve the Unemployment Insurance system. While there is a series of reforms to the UI system federal lawmakers can make,⁴¹ state lawmakers should focus on four areas that will particularly benefit workers in Maine's most remote regions:

- Broadening eligibility to include more part-time and seasonal workers
- Increasing the amount of time that beneficiaries can receive payments, especially in times of high unemployment
- Improving the wage replacement rate for the lowest-paid workers
- Reforming the UI tax to apply to a larger share of wages

Support subsidies for health insurance premiums. Maine's federal delegation should work to continue the enhanced premium tax credits, which have reduced the cost of insurance since 2022, especially for rural Mainers. State lawmakers can also look at ways to subsidize the cost of premiums, as several states already do.

Make health insurance more affordable. State lawmakers should end the geographic price discrimination in Maine that hurts Mainers in the most rural areas. The legislature reduced the extent of geographic pricing in 2024 from 50% to 25%, but it could end this unfair practice entirely by designating the entire state of Maine a single "rating area" as some states, including New Hampshire and Vermont, have already done.

Undo and minimize harms from the 2025 Reconciliation Act. The act threatens to take away food and medical assistance from tens of thousands of Mainers who fail to meet new or expanded work reporting requirements. The state's more rural areas will feel the impacts most keenly given the higher rates of unemployment. Maine's Congressional delegation should work to reverse these changes at the federal level. Meanwhile, state lawmakers can invest in infrastructure to reduce the administrative burden on Mainers, make it easier for impacted Mainers to find work or education, and offer additional resources to Mainers who fail the new work reporting requirements so they maintain access to assistance. In some cases, state legislators should continue to provide these important benefits by using state funds.

Research shows expanding Medicaid eligibility improves people's ability to work⁴² — and in Maine it has led to tens of thousands of Mainers receiving treatment for conditions like mental health issues and substance use disorder, which are common barriers to employment.⁴³

Conclusion

Maine's economic challenges extend beyond its most rural regions, reflecting systemic issues that impact communities across the state. While the Portland metro area has experienced robust growth, much of Maine continues to face stagnant wages, limited job opportunities, and persistent barriers to health care, housing, and food security. Policy choices at both the state and federal level make these differences bigger. This report concludes that strategies relying on corporate tax breaks or narrow development incentives will not close these gaps. Instead, Maine needs an approach that invests in people: strengthening the safety net, modernizing unemployment insurance, expanding access to affordable health care, and ensuring fair wages for all workers. By prioritizing these policies, lawmakers can build an economy that works for every Mainer — rural or urban — and fulfill the promise of “the way life should be.”

In the words of workers:

“We live in ‘vacationland,’ but vacationland for who? Because we’re working our butts off. We all are. It shouldn’t be unaffordable to just take good care of myself. Politicians need to change the way they’re talking about this. Let’s talk about what we agree on.”

- Jesse, carpenter

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In the words of workers: Abbey



Abbey is a student in the automotive program at Southern Maine Community College and also works two part-time jobs, including one at a Ford dealership. Abbey attends SMCC tuition-free through Maine's free community college tuition program, currently set to expire with this year's graduating class.

I really didn't want to have to deal with student loans and struggle to pay them off in the future. So not having to worry about tuition and loans took a lot off my plate. Besides that, I would have a career straight out of college, and opportunities for paid internships while still in school.

Working at the dealership while doing the college program has definitely given me a reason to stay. I'm actually taking what I'm learning and applying it in the real world. **I already have a career. I don't have to go hunt for one. I feel very confident going into the future, that I've got all my training and I know what I'm doing.** Hopefully everything keeps going well and stays on the up. Mechanics make decent money when they're really good at it.

Right now, when everything is so expensive, I'm kind of worried about how that will affect my life going forward. I still live with my family because it's too expensive to try to live on my own while going to school. **I see a lot of people my age who are living on their own and struggling quite a bit. They have two jobs and side hustles as well, and they're still struggling to make ends meet.** That's where my anxiety for the future stems from: will this be difficult when I get out of school? Because I don't want to live with my parents forever. I want to live my own life. I want to live the way I want to live.

I just want to be comfortable, where I don't have to worry financially and I can treat myself on occasion. If I see a nice pair of shoes I can feel like, "I can get this. I'm on budget, I'll be alright."

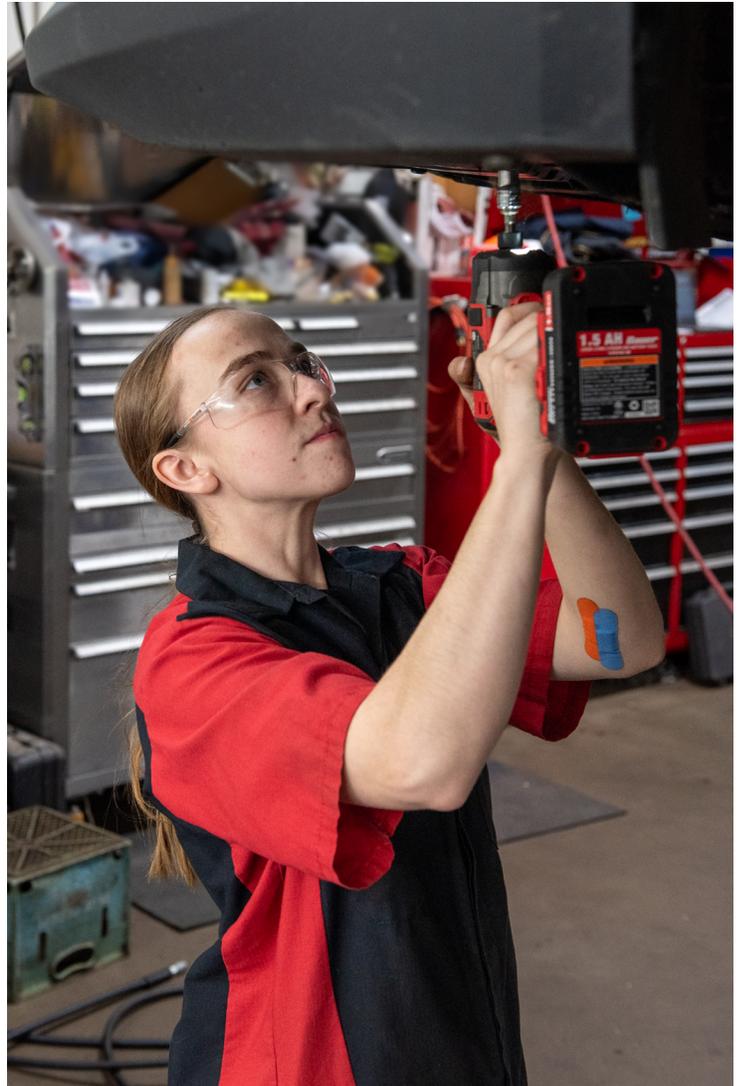
"I know being an adult is not supposed to be easy, but it's also not supposed to be paycheck-to-paycheck expensive when you're working more than 40 hours a week. We just need things to be a little bit easier."

In the words of workers: Abbey

If my truck breaks down, I could buy the parts to fix it. I would have the resources I need.

It's really important to keep young people here. Free education really helps. Affordable housing is definitely needed, especially for students just out of college who don't have their feet under them yet. Good jobs that pay well. Mental health is a big concern for my generation. I wish people were more understanding about that, and how serious it actually is. It's not a joke. I've struggled with mental health problems. Most of my friends struggle with mental health problems. I don't know how to fix that, but just making it easier and more affordable to get care would take a lot of stress off those who aren't blessed to be in a wealthy family.

I know being an adult is not supposed to be easy, but it's also not supposed to be paycheck-to-paycheck expensive when you're working more than 40 hours a week. We just need things to be a little bit easier.



In the words of workers: Becky



Becky is the co-founder of FlatWear, clothing designed for women who choose flat closure after mastectomy. Her company is based in Mid-coast Maine, where she also works as a realtor. Becky launched the brand's first line of clothing this year, just as the Trump administration's tariff plans began.

It was always my hope that we could have everything made in Maine. This is a Maine company — that's what we wanted. We first tried to go through a manufacturer in Westbrook, but they turned us down. Then we broadened the search to New England. **But it's like a secret club, trying to find a manufacturer. It's so, so hard. A lot of manufacturers won't touch small orders.** We found one really great company in upstate New York, but our cost was going to be \$190 per dress. These are clothes for women who've had breast cancer. We're trying to keep things affordable. We can't be charging them \$350 for a cotton dress! So, that's when we started looking overseas.

We started working with a manufacturer in India last year. When tariffs were first announced, we thought we were so smart since India wasn't initially included. But with other bigger companies rushing there to avoid tariffs, production on our small line almost completely ground to a halt. Then in August, there is a 25% tariff. By that point we were already way behind in production. We had five boxes on the way, the bulk of our inventory. **Then, the day before our inventory arrived, tariffs on India doubled to 50%! Tariffs are charged when the products arrive in the US, not when they're shipped. More than half of the total price we paid for all our inventory was our tariff bill. And there was nothing we could do.**

We categorically decided we would not increase our prices, but we're really skating a fine line. We now have a much smaller inventory, and we abandoned plans for seasonal lines. We wanted to rent a

“The day before our inventory arrived, tariffs on India doubled to 50%! Tariffs are charged when the products arrive in the US, not when they're shipped. More than half of the total price we paid for all our inventory was our tariff bill. And there was nothing we could do.”

In the words of workers: Becky

production space, but we can't afford to do that now.

We're getting creative with everything and trying to be as scrappy as possible. I'm optimistic about our future, but we're in this weird tariff land. There are so many unknowns.

It's such a catch-22: we can't afford to order more inventory from India, because the tariff is too high. Even if we make the clothes here, it's almost impossible to find affordable, high quality fabric in the US. It's much cheaper to order it from overseas, but then you've got this huge tariff when it comes in. And you still have to find people with the skills to make the clothes.

People always say, "Manufacture in the United States! Make it in Maine!" But *how*? I mean I thought that, too. I want the cute little "Made in Maine" tag on our clothes. But you know, it's just not affordable. That's the bottom line. And I don't know how to make it affordable. I don't know how you do that.



In the words of workers: Jane and Chelsea



Jane and her daughter Chelsea live in Hope and co-own Just Ask Jane, a property management service. Together, they manage 54 properties between Northport and St. George.

Jane: If you want to work in Camden, there's really nowhere to live. **There are plenty of winter rentals because we're so seasonal, but the people who work here need housing in the summer, too. But there just isn't any.** All these houses that rent during the summer jack up their nightly and weekly prices so high, because they know they can get it and that's when they make their money. During COVID, a lot of people came in and bought up a lot of our houses, using them as second, third, and fourth homes. We call them "dark houses" — four-season housing that's not being used year-round.

Over the last few years, we've had to morph our company as needed. We shifted from cleaning to property management, and now we also do some interior painting. We shop for some clients. We've fixed furniture. We try to find whatever it is that can fill that niche so we can continue to make money and serve more people.

Because of tariffs, we now make guesstimates instead of estimates. It's just too hard to make an estimate for anything, and materials take such a long time to get here, that by the time we get something in it could cost the client 10 to 20% more. It's exhausting. It costs us work and it makes us shy away from bigger projects. **People said all our supply chain issues were supposed to get better once COVID ended. We haven't seen any difference, except that costs keep going higher and higher.**

My husband and I buy our own health insurance through the marketplace. The cost is going up 10% next year. It's very stressful. I just don't know how I'm going to figure that out. It's tough when you work so hard, to be paying all that money into a system that you don't know if you are even going to use. **It just doesn't make any sense that I have to pay so much out of pocket before they'll even start paying for anything we've had done. They're making a lot of money. It's just wrong.** We have to keep stepping

"The Maine way is to have more than one job. We are hardworking individuals. People from away always joke, 'everyone's so busy here.' Yeah, we are!"

In the words of workers: Jane and Chelsea

things up in a way that never gives us a break because we're always having to make more money to pay this stupid new health insurance bill.

Do our lawmakers understand what's really going on? Do they personally understand it?

Or are they just going with the flow, and thinking that's just the way it is. Because we need to think outside the box. What are they going to do to help us?

Chelsea: The biggest challenge of being a small business owner in a rural place is the inconsistency. We don't know what projects are going to be on our horizon from year to year. Material costs change constantly, so creating cost estimates for our clients is really hard. Our slogan is "making your life easier, one task at a time." But there are some weeks where every day is a Monday. That's what it feels like.

Running a small business is a way of life around here. There are so many of us who try to be creative and try to make it work, but a small business is not the same as a large corporation.

The small business is working 90 times harder than that corporation. The Maine way is to have more than one job. We are hardworking individuals. People from away always joke, "everyone's so busy here." Yeah, we are!

Turning 26 and having to pay for my own health insurance was really scary. You don't think about health care until you're the one who has to pay for it.

I went a few years without health insurance because it was just too expensive. Last year I didn't qualify for MaineCare so I didn't have insurance, but this year I did. It's hard, because we never know what we're going to make year to year. So when I do qualify, I go see all the doctors! When those Medicaid rules change, I'm not sure how I will prove that I'm eligible. I work full time, but I don't get a pay stub.

In my age group, I have maybe two friends who own houses. And that's because they're married and have partners to share the cost with. **It's hard to find any rental opportunities, but money-wise and location-wise, it's even harder here. The cost of living is just so high.** There are not many people here in my age group, or even people I graduated with. Everyone moves away, and to even be able to afford housing they're going to the Carolinas or Florida and other places. It's pretty sad.

People my age look at the wealth of the older generations and wonder how they'll ever get there. Even when those people were in their 30s and 40s, they were much farther along financially than my generation is at that age. It seems much harder to advance now.



In the words of workers: Jesse



Jesse is a carpenter living in Hope with his wife and daughter. They are expecting their second child in 2026.

It sounds cliché, but when you dial it back to **when things really changed in terms of the pace of life, the crazy inflation, how much we all have to work, and how tired we all are, COVID was the moment.** I'm glad I was in Maine when it happened. There was enough space to breathe, literally and figuratively.

Here in a rural town, you're scrappy. You do what it takes to survive. When you ask Mainers what they do for work, they'll say they do one thing, but they also fix cars, or have a huge garden, or take care of 300 pigs, or have a food truck in town, or they keep bees. Everybody has all these legitimate side hustles! At first, I was really charmed by that, but now I realize it's because that's what's necessary to survive up here. There's no Netflix and chilling up here, dude. We have to stack the wood!

I can't imagine working more than I do and keeping a household going. But **health care is completely unaffordable, and it's the one thing I could cut out of my monthly budget.** We can't go without food. We can't go without heat or electricity. So I am just going to take the risk. I don't think that's uncommon in the trades. But it feels really unstable for me, and kind of scary.

My new employer does offer health insurance plans, but they don't pay as much towards the plans as my previous employer. You might as well not have insurance at all because the deductible is so high. That's like \$4,000 a year just to be in the club. **And if I chop my finger off on the table saw, the deductibles and co-insurance costs are so high — how do I pay for that? Honestly, I'd rather have that \$4,000 to put towards my credit card, because that's how I'm going to be paying for the health care anyway.** I need that money paycheck to paycheck.

“Here in a rural town, you're scrappy. You do what it takes to survive. When you ask Mainers what they do for work, they'll say they do one thing, but they also fix cars, or have a huge garden, or take care of 300 pigs, or have a food truck in town, or they keep bees.”

In the words of workers: Jesse

We used to qualify for SNAP, which was really helpful when my daughter was first born. But then **I got a raise of about 50 cents an hour and it put us just over the income threshold. I was like, "Oh my gosh, seriously?" I'd rather take the SNAP. \$150 in food aid is worth a lot more than that \$20 per week raise!**

And what they're doing with the SNAP and the WIC right now – all the new hoops to jump through to prove your income – working parents don't have time to do that paperwork. That's a lot of work, just to be honest and keep up. **They keep saying people take advantage of the system, but maybe it's the system that's taking advantage of them.**

I have a healthy kid and another one on the way, I have two dogs and three acres of land. I'm living the life I want to live. I just wish I had a little more free time to enjoy it. I wish I didn't have to work so much and work so hard, so that I could actually run around in the chicken coop with the kid. I mean, damn, man, it's dark when I leave and it's dark when I come home.

We live in "vacationland," but vacationland for who? Because we're working our butts off. We all are.



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About MECEP

Maine Center for Economic Policy (MECEP) is a nonpartisan research and policy organization dedicated to improving the economic wellbeing of Mainers with low and moderate income. Since 1994, MECEP has helped secure improved economic opportunity for Mainers throughout their lives by advocating for fairer tax policies; access to education, health care, and livable wage jobs; and critical investment in government programs and services on which Maine people rely.

About the author

James Myall is MECEP's lead on labor and workforce issues and education, health care, and immigration policy. He conducts research and impact analyses, writes educational materials, and collaborates with partners. James is skilled in data collection, research, and statistical and policy analysis. He has a master's degree in public policy and management from the University of Southern Maine and a master's degree in ancient history and archaeology from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

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