

**GOAL 1: PRESERVATION OF HOUSING AND RELATED NEEDS**

**Objectives:**

**1. To preserve subsidized and other affordable rental housing opportunities for low income individuals.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will provide legal representation to tenants in order to ensure access to or prevent eviction from public housing, subsidized housing, private housing, mobile homes or mobile home parks, motels and boarding homes, or other rental housing used by low-income individuals and families in Maine. Legal issues may include review of credit scores and other documentation affecting access to housing, violations of VAWA protections or due process protections for individuals with limited English proficiency.

Matters: Pine Tree will provide legal information and referral to low-income individuals with questions related to subsidized or other affordable rental housing opportunities. Staff and volunteers will refer individuals in long-term motel, boarding house, or other similar establishments to the Maine Revenue Service regarding rebate of motel sales taxes. The Pine Tree website will provide accurate user-friendly information on these topics. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that promote increased awareness of the legal rights related to subsidized and other affordable housing opportunities.

**2. To protect home ownership by low-income individuals.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families who are confronted by legal challenges to initial or continued homeownership, including mortgage and property tax foreclosures and other issues related to tax delinquency, reverse mortgages, and improper actions (by a private individual, business or government) which threaten continued residence in the family home. Legal issues may include use of remedies through the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.

Matters: Pine Tree will provide legal information and referral where appropriate to low-income individuals and families who are confronted by legal challenges to initial or continued homeownership. The Pine Tree website will provide accurate user-friendly information on these topics. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that promote increased awareness of the legal rights related to homeownership, including Court information sessions related to foreclosure mediation. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities designed to improve understanding and protection of homeownership rights, including support for the Maine Housing Counseling Network and pro bono services through Maine Attorneys Saving Homes [MASH].

**3. To reduce homelessness in Maine among teens, adults, and families.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families who are at immediate risk of homelessness where legal representation can prevent that outcome, including courthouse “FED” projects operated within Maine District Courts. As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will provide holistic representation to those who have already become homeless in order to stabilize their living situation.

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Matters: Pine Tree will provide legal information and referral to low-income individuals with questions related to homelessness and on benefits and resources that may assist a homeless individual in stabilizing their living situation. The Pine Tree website will provide accurate user-friendly information on these topics. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that promote increased awareness of the programs and laws important in ending homelessness.

**4. To reduce illegal discrimination in housing in Maine.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families who have experienced discrimination in housing under federal or state law, and represent individuals with disabilities who require a reasonable accommodation to access or retain housing. As special funding permits, Pine Tree will operate a fair housing testing program designed to identify discriminatory housing practices and take appropriate legal action to end those practices.

Matters: Pine Tree staff and volunteers will provide legal information and referral related to claims of housing discrimination. The Pine Tree website will provide accurate user-friendly information addressing laws and rights related to housing discrimination in Maine. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that promote increased awareness of laws and rights related to housing discrimination in Maine.

**5. To reduce predatory practices affecting housing for low-income individuals.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families who are confronted with violations of federal or state law that seek to exploit ignorance of legal protections or rights regarding housing, including illegal or unlawful land installment contracts, “rent to own” or “option to buy” arrangements with individuals or businesses, predatory financing arrangements that jeopardize mobile home or other housing opportunities, and fraudulent housing advertisements.

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral related to housing questions in this area. The Pine Tree website will provide accurate user-friendly information addressing laws and rights related to predatory practices affecting housing. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that increase awareness of predatory practices or are designed to stop them from occurring in Maine.

**6. To enforce legal protections against unsafe housing conditions.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families who are confronted with violations of Maine law involved unsafe housing and/or violations of Maine’s warranty of habitability protections (including lead poisoning from paint or water.)

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral related to unsafe housing. The Pine Tree website will provide accurate user-friendly information addressing laws and rights related to unsafe housing and Maine’s warranty of habitability protections. Pine Tree will participate in

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training events and other activities that increase awareness of legal rights related to unsafe housing and Maine's warranty of habitability protections.

**7. To enforce other federal or state laws regarding rental housing on behalf of low-income individuals.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families who are confronted with other violations of Maine law regarding rental housing, including but not limited to issues affecting fuel assistance, security deposits, rent escrow accounts, side payments to subsidized rental agreements, utility shutoffs or common metering, rent abatements, or termination of tenancy.

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral where appropriate to low-income individuals with other rental housing questions. The Pine Tree website will provide accurate user-friendly information addressing laws and rights related to these issues. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that increase awareness of legal rights related to these issues in rental housing.

**GOAL II. MAINTAINING, ENHANCING AND PROTECTING INCOME AND ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR LOW-INCOME MAINERS.**

**Objectives**

**1. To enforce federal and state laws regarding government benefits for low-income individuals in order to protect subsistence income.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families appealing a denial, reduction or termination of income or non-cash assistance from a government benefit program, including but not limited to General Assistance, TANF, Unemployment Compensation, VA benefits, and SNAP/Food Stamps, particularly where no other legal aid or pro bono resource is available. As resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals who have a meritorious defense to an alleged overpayment of a public benefit where collection of the overpayment will diminish the household income if unaddressed.

Matters: Staff and volunteers will provide information and referral where appropriate to individuals with questions about income and non-cash assistance from a government benefit program. The Pine Tree website will provide accurate user-friendly information addressing laws and rights related to cash and non-cash assistance benefit programs. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that increase awareness of legal rights related to cash and non-cash assistance programs.

**2. To enforce federal and state laws regarding debt collection for low-income individuals.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families who have been subjected to predatory consumer lending practices, illegal debt collection practices, or related activities (including erroneous credit scores) that threaten household stability, housing or future employability. Issues may include third party credit card debt,

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medical debt, student loan debt, car loans and judgment liens, disclosure proceedings that threaten exempt income or assets, and Fair Debt Collections Practice Act claims.

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral where appropriate to individuals with questions about predatory lending or debt collection. The Pine Tree website will provide accurate user-friendly information addressing debt collection laws and rights. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that increase awareness of legal rights related to debt collection.

**3. To enforce consumer protections in order to protect assets and income essential for low-income individuals to maintain stability.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families confronting serious consumer problems, including onerous installment purchases, financial scams, or price gouging. In limited circumstances, Pine Tree will represent existing clients who also need bankruptcy protection, especially using volunteer attorney resources.

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral where appropriate to individuals facing serious consumer problems that threaten assets or income. To the extent that these issues are not addressed in the Maine Office of Attorney General Consumer Guide, the Pine Tree websites will provide accurate user-friendly information addressing these problems. As needed, Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities to increase awareness of legal rights in this area.

**GOAL III. PROMOTING THE SAFETY, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF LOW-INCOME MAINERS**

**Objectives:**

**1. To assist victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, trafficking, or stalking and their children in obtaining protection from abuse and stabilizing their lives.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent victims and their children, primarily in response to referrals from local victim advocacy organizations or other appropriate sources in order to avoid creating potential conflicts of interest. Legal representation will include both protection from abuse or harassment proceedings and advocacy to resolve civil legal problems in order to secure the victim's safety, economic stability or well-being.

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral where appropriate to victims. The Pine Tree websites will provide accurate user-friendly information addressing the legal needs of adult and child victims these problems. As needed, Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities to increase awareness of legal right of victims.

**2. To maximize access to health care for low-income individuals and to utilize legal services to reduce health-harming factors.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families who are denied healthcare benefits, equipment or services, including individuals denied

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Medicaid benefits or Medicaid-type services with a focus on residential services or services where a shortage of providers exists in a geographical area. Pine Tree will also represent minors who have a right to consent to or refuse to consent to medical treatment and address confidentiality issues related to health services when facing barriers asserting those rights.

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral related to healthcare issues and resources. The Pine Tree websites will provide or link to accurate user-friendly information addressing healthcare resources in Maine. As needed, Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that increase awareness of health-harming factors that can be addressed with legal services.

**3. To allow low-income individuals to make informed decisions regarding protection from harassment or family law proceedings (including divorce, parental rights and responsibilities, child support, or grandparent visitation issues)**

Cases: In general, in order to limit potential conflicts of interest with victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, trafficking or stalking, Pine Tree will not provide legal service to other low-income individuals seeking assistance with protection from harassment or family law assistance. Pine Tree will consider representation in child support cases presenting DHHS process concerns for existing clients (including veterans) or in exceptional circumstances. Pine Tree will also accept cases referred by the VLP to the Coffin Fellowship program or pursuant to other special funding where there is a limited risk of conflicts that could prevent legal assistance to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or dating violence.

Matters: As long as it is done in a way to avoid potential conflicts, Pine Tree will provide information and referral resources to individuals seeking assistance with protection from harassment, guardianship or family law. The Pine Tree websites will provide accurate user-friendly information designed to allow low-income individuals to make informed decisions in all of these areas. As needed, Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that increase understanding of family law proceedings, guardianship or protection from harassment.

**4. Assist low-income parents who have been wrongfully substantiated for abuse and/or neglect of children by the State**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent low-income parents in DHHS substantiation appeals where the substantiation is based upon the parent's status as a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault, the presence of a disability, or where the substantiation will impact the client's livelihood.

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral to low-income parents with legal questions regarding DHHS substantiations. The Pine Tree websites will provide or link to accurate user-friendly information addressing DHHS substantiation proceedings and legal protections. As needed, Pine Tree staff and volunteers will participate in training events and other activities that increase awareness of legal protections important to DHHS substantiation proceedings.

**GOAL IV: IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR MAINE CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

**Objectives:**

**1. To give all Maine children access to an education and appropriate educational programming.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent students and their families to secure needed education services in a variety of circumstances. This advocacy may be done on behalf of students with disabilities; students who are not currently attending school; students who are failing school; students who face disciplinary charges or have been expelled from school, and students who have been victims of violence, including dating violence and sexual assault, and bullying based upon protected classes under the Maine Human Rights Act.

Matters: Staff and volunteers will provide information and referral to individuals whose children do not have access to appropriate educational programs. The KIDS LEGAL website will provide accurate user-friendly information designed to allow low-income individuals to make informed decisions regarding education and appropriate educational programming. Pine Tree staff and volunteers will participate in training events and other activities that increase understanding of access to education and appropriate educational programming.

**2. To provide stability and safety for children and youth who are homeless or unaccompanied by parents.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit and where other resources are unavailable, Pine Tree will represent children and youth who are runaways, homeless or considered unaccompanied minors in order to protect their legal rights and provide them with stability and safety, including education cases, guardianships, and protection from abuse proceedings..

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral to eligible youth who are homeless or unaccompanied by parents. The KIDS LEGAL website will provide accurate user-friendly information designed to allow homeless or unaccompanied youth to understand their legal rights and to make informed decisions. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that increase understanding of the legal rights of homeless and unaccompanied children and youth.

**3. To improve outcomes for children and youth involved in the juvenile justice system.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families where legal services can strengthen educational services or other supports for children and youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral to individuals and families regarding issues that could put a child or youth at risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system. The KIDS LEGAL website will provide accurate user-friendly information to reduce the risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that improve coordination of services for children and youth who are at risk or already involved in the juvenile justice system.

**GOAL V: ENFORCE WORKPLACE OPPORTUNITIES, INCOME AND LEGAL PROTECTIONS FOR LOW-WAGE WORKERS**

**Objectives:**

**1. To enforce laws protecting the rights of agricultural workers.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent eligible individuals and their families who work or have worked in agriculture, livestock or forestry in Maine, including workers who are eligible for representation under anti-abuse laws. Legal representation will include problems related to employment (including recruitment, compensation, and housing), discrimination, tax issues, public benefits (including healthcare) and education. Workers who are victims of crime or abuse (including sexual assault) may also be represented in obtaining protection from abuse and/or in related legal proceedings, particularly when special funding is available to support this work. In general, legal representation on immigration issues will be limited in scope and referred to other legal aid services for full representation.

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral to individuals and their families who are now or have worked in agricultural, livestock or forestry in Maine. As grant funding requires, Pine Tree will also support information and referral resources to eligible individuals in the other New England states, via outreach and/or through partnerships with other providers (including migrant health and migrant education providers). This responsibility also includes development and distribution of bilingual legal education materials where appropriate to serve workers with limited English proficiency (including Spanish and Haitian-Creole.) Pine Tree will also support training events and other activities that improve understanding of legal rights and resources for agricultural workers in Maine (and throughout New England, as grant funding requires.)

**2. To enforce legal rights of individual employees who are confronted with legal problems related to their jobs.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will provide limited representation to employees and their families on wage and hour claims and potential remedies through the Maine Wage Reassurance Act, due process rights, employment discrimination, disability insurance claims, at will employment issues, severance agreements, non-competition covenants, family medical and military leave provisions, accommodation requests, and whistleblower retaliation. This work may also include assistance to people facing an impediment to employability due to the threatened loss of an occupational license or the loss of a motor vehicle license as a result of debt (which could include child support.)

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral related to employment law issues for low-income workers. The Pine Tree websites will provide or link to accurate user-friendly information addressing employment law protections in Maine. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that increase awareness of employment law rights for low-wage workers.

**3. To enforce legal rights of individual taxpayers related to federal tax obligations and programs.**

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Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families needing consultations or extended representation to resolve federal tax controversies with the Internal Revenue Service (which may include related Maine Revenue Service issues.)

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral to low-income individuals (including individuals with limited English proficiency) regarding federal tax rights and responsibilities. Consistent with grant deliverables, staff and volunteers will conduct low-income taxpayer clinics for individuals with limited English proficiency or who face equivalent literacy barriers. The Pine Tree websites will provide or link to accurate user-friendly information addressing federal and state tax laws and resources in Maine. As needed, Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that increase awareness of federal or state tax laws and resources.

## **GOAL VI: MEETING THE LEGAL NEEDS OF POPULATIONS WITH OTHER VULNERABILITIES**

### **Objectives:**

#### **1. To enforce laws protecting the rights of Native Americans.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families facing legal problems related to their status as Native Americans, including but not limited to: tribal housing, employment, benefits and services; tribal land usage and other rights arising under tribal law; wills and estate planning specific to reservation properties or tribal courts; racial discrimination; access to healthcare; legal needs of Indian elders and youth; the Indian Child Welfare Act; education; border crossing rights, treaty rights, and other rights arising under federal Indian Law. As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent Native Americans in tribal court proceedings to insure access to justice. Because of Pine Tree's historic engagement to support tribal sovereignty, the program does not take cases challenging tribal sovereignty or tribal government officials.

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral to Native Americans in Maine (and, as grant funding requires, to Native Americans in Connecticut) regarding legal problems related to their status as Native Americans, as well as with other legal problems handled for the general client population. The Pine Tree websites will provide or link to accurate user-friendly information addressing legal protections and rights of Native Americans. As needed, Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that increase awareness of legal protections and rights of Native Americans.

#### **2. To enforce laws protecting the rights of low-income individuals with limited English proficiency.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families with limited English proficiency who need additional legal intervention to enforce their rights, including victims of abuse, individuals facing eviction or unable to access housing because of discrimination; individuals who have received denials or have been unable to access government benefit programs as a result of due process violations, and children or youth experiencing educational challenges.



Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral for individuals with limited English proficiency who do not have equal access to governmental services, or who are confronted with a civil legal problem for which they have sought assistance from Pine Tree. The Pine Tree websites will offer legal resources in languages other than English in order to increase access by those with limited English proficiency. As needed, Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities that increase awareness of legal protections and rights of individuals with limited English proficiency, including nonprofit organizations, client groups and others serving specific or general refugee or immigrant communities in Maine.

**3. To enforce laws protecting the rights of low-income individuals with disabilities.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families that include members with disabilities who need legal intervention to enforce their rights, including the following: individuals facing eviction or unable to access housing because of discrimination on the basis of disability; individuals who have received incorrect denials of SSI and social security benefits for non-disability reasons and in meritorious waiver of recovery of SSI and Social Security overpayment denials; and individuals with disabilities whose access to governmental services is limited due to disability.

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral for individuals with disabilities who do not have equal access to governmental services or other legal benefits and rights. The Pine Tree websites will offer legal resources specifically addressing the legal rights of individuals with disabilities, and website content will be accessible to those who are blind or are visually-impaired. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities to increase awareness of legal protections and rights of individuals with disabilities.

**4. To enforce laws protecting the rights of service members, veterans and their families.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families with military service, including those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, as well as those who cannot access other resources in enforcing legal rights and protections available to them as a result of military service or otherwise.

Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral for individuals with military service about their legal rights and benefits. The Pine Tree websites (including [www.statesidelegal.org](http://www.statesidelegal.org)) will provide or link to accurate user-friendly information addressing legal protections and rights of individuals with military service. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities to increase awareness of legal protections and rights of individuals with military service.

**5. To enforce laws protecting the rights of Maine individuals regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent individuals and families who need legal intervention to enforce their rights as a result of the sexual orientation or gender identity of an individual or family member.

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Matters: Pine Tree will provide information and referral for individuals whose rights may be affected because of sexual orientation or gender identity. The Pine Tree websites will provide or link to accurate user-friendly information addressing legal protections and rights of individuals whose rights may be affected because of sexual orientation or gender identity. Pine Tree will participate in training events and other activities to increase awareness of legal protections and rights of individuals whose rights may be affected because of sexual orientation or gender identity.

**GOAL VII: IMPROVING THE DELIVERY OF LEGAL SERVICES AND JUSTICE FOR LOW-INCOME MAINERS STATEWIDE**

**Objectives:**

- 1. To respond to the emergency needs of low-income individuals who are unable to access any other legal service and whose legal claims involve a problem within Pine Tree's expertise.**

Cases: As staff and funding resources permit, Pine Tree will represent eligible individuals and families facing emergencies which threaten basic necessities, personal safety or wellbeing, and those who cannot otherwise access free legal services to address these problems.

- 2. To support developments in the civil justice system that promote equal justice for all Maine residents**

Matters: As staff and funding resources allow, Pine Tree will provide client education materials and resources addressing common civil legal needs in Maine written at a 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading level in English and other languages associated with significant low-income populations in Maine, and using technologies (including audio and video content) that ensure widespread access and understanding of that information. Pine Tree will participate in projects and initiatives (including multidisciplinary collaborations with schools, healthcare providers, and social service agencies) that can improve the ability of low-income individuals to recognize when problems would benefit from legal service, to understand their legal rights, and to respond and resolve their legal problems in both administrative and court proceedings. Pine Tree will work with other stakeholders in the civil justice system to strengthen referral and information, to expand *pro bono* resources, and to promote new or expanded legal resources for low income individuals.