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Maine Community Action Partnership Supports LD 1966 An Act To Facilitate Access to Heating Assistance

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Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester, Members of the Committee On Labor and Housing, I am Megan Hannan, Executive Director of the Maine Community Action Partnership and we support LD 1966, An Act To Facilitate Access to Heating Assistance.

Maine Community Action Agencies, with one exception, are the local program operators and administrators referenced in this bill. The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, or HEAP, is one of our largest and oldest programs. Nine of our ten agencies have significant staff and infrastructure attached to it. We also use this program to introduce and feed our customers into other programs and services they are likely eligible for and may want to use; we are invested in the Whole Family approach to our customers.

Those programs include the Emergency Rental Assistance program, which we have also been operating since its beginning, 23 months ago, and have been using online applications since its inception. Certainly, we have been helping customers who do not have access to or are not comfortable with online applications, I personally have typed up many, but for those many Mainers who have been using online applications, online shopping and even reading the news online, the option has proven very effective.

The software we use can be programmed to accept HEAP applications online, too. In fact, our sister Community Action Agencies in New Jersey are already doing it, in fact are using a single, universal application as the portal to their many programs, and it is my goal to have Maine's agencies do the same as soon as possible.

MaineHousing, which is the Federal program grantee, uses a different software, which we share for this program. I understand they are in discussions with them to also allow online applications.

However it happens, I am sure that we can and will be able to accept online applications for the program beginning no later than the 2022-23 winter season.

Thank you for your time and attention, I am happy to answer any questions you have.

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