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**Maine Community Action Partnership Supports LD 3:
An Act to Establish the Winter Energy Relief Payment Program to
Aid Residents with High Heating Costs and to Finalize the COVID
Pandemic Relief Payment Program**
December 21, 2022

Senator Jackson, Representative Talbot Ross, ladies and gentlemen of the Committee On Appropriations and Financial Affairs, I am Megan Hannan, Executive Director of Maine Community Action Partnership, the association of the ten community action agencies in Maine and we support LD 3 "An Act to Establish the Winter Energy Relief Payment Program to Aid Residents with High Heating Costs and to Finalize the COVID Pandemic Relief Payment Program."

As we all know, heating fuel prices are at an all time high this year, and although our share of the federally funded Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP, or HEAP) is a little above last year's funding, the higher price of fuel means we can either serve fewer people with the same benefit as last year, or the same number of households will receive a lower benefit. My organization has been lucky to receive donations for supporting families who are struggling with heating costs, but the demand far outweighs the supply.

Putting \$50,000,000 in the hands of community action agencies, who are the local administrators of HEAP funds, means that many more households will be safe and warm this winter. Of that sum, \$10 million will be accessed by those who are not eligible for HEAP funds, either by being just over the income limits or having already used their HEAP benefit. We will make sure that those funds are low barrier to access and not subject to the lengthy process Federal HEAP funds require. The other \$40 million, of course, will be accessible through the regular HEAP process to assure proper distribution.

This bill also addresses our current housing crisis. The \$21,000,000 allocated in this bill will allow our emergency rental assistance program to finish payments to eligible households for the winter, averting a potential crisis of homeless families in the dead of our coldest season. We know we need a medium- and long-term solution to this problem and that this only buys us some time to address those pressing needs and we are working on that; in the meantime, we do need this bridge to assure families are safe during the winter.

Finally, this bill also puts money directly in the pockets of those who need it most. We know the simple solution to being able to eat, heat and pay bills is having money with which to do so, and this second round of relief goes a long way to doing that.

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