

Ella Tabasky
Brunswick
LD 3

President Jackson, Speaker Talbot Ross, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit a public comment in SUPPORT of 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.

Heating and energy prices, inflation, and several other factors are expected to stretch family budgets thin and limit the reach of existing home heating assistance programs. This has resulted in hundreds of Mainers currently without shelter, at risk of eviction, or worried about how they are going to afford their next bill payments. These are our neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family.

I have been following firsthand reports from caseworkers and street outreach teams about how dire the housing situation truly is – shelters do not have beds, many families are sleeping in their cars or in tents with insufficient clothing and bedding, and worse – people are quite literally freezing on the streets.

In 1948, the United States signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, recognizing adequate housing as a component of the human right to an adequate standard of living. I encourage you to do everything in your power to reduce the number of people in Maine for whom this right has been violated.

By supporting LD 3, you will help provide critical support to help our community remain safely housed and warm this winter. That said, voting on this bill after the holiday keeps many people at risk during a time when we should be caring most about others' health and safety. I urge you to expedite this process so that support can IMMEDIATELY get into the hands of those who need it most. For some, it is a matter of life and death.

It is not lost on me that today, December 21st, is the longest night of the year. This night is remembered annually as Homeless Persons' Memorial Day, a time when we remember the people who lost their lives while experiencing homelessness. I especially think of my husband's Uncle Al, who has been living on the streets of Portland for over a decade. I hope he has a warm bed at night, but I fear that the services available to him are so taxed that he might perish in the cold. I do not want this for Al or for anyone else.

I urge you to rush an emergency vote on funding BEFORE the holiday break. There is no enjoyment in the holidays for those without roofs over their heads or who are at risk of losing their homes because they cannot afford to heat them. Please use compassion as you consider how to proceed.

Respectfully,
Ella D. Tabasky
Brunswick