



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

"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 1:00 pm State House Room 228]

Senator Jackson], Representative Talbot-Ross, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Peter Swarr and I am the Priest of Trinity Episcopal Church located at 580 Forest Ave in Portland. I am testifying **in support of LD 3**.

I am in the midst of writing my Christmas sermon. A story about a young unmarried couple searching for housing, unable to find a place to live, facing unspeakable circumstances, facing long odds, who will soon flee to Egypt to protect their Son's life.

As I write this sermon, I am also assisting Arthur, a longtime Portland resident, who qualifies for housing subsidies but can't find an apartment. Arthur lives in a motel room paid for with ERA funding and who is facing eviction at the end of the month. He is terrified that he will freeze to death once eviction comes, and so I plan on paying for a motel room in Portland come December 31st. You see there is still no room at the inn 2000 years after that first Christmas...because all the shelters are overflowing here.

I am also helping the Khalende family, who walked from Colombia to Mexico, and was living in the Howard Johnson in South Portland. They now live in a three bedroom apartment I pay for week to week in Pine Point. They were given 22 hours notice to relocate their family of six. They were told to call their family and friends for help...their family lives in Congo, their friends live in the HoJo in South Portland. Thanks be to God they were connected to a community of Christians because there is still no room at the inn.

I am helping parishioners refill their oil tanks and pay their gas bills because they cannot afford groceries, medicine, and keep the heat on at the same time. I am working as best I can to stave off evictions, maintain food, keep people safe, and care for the people God has entrusted to me.

I write my Christmas sermon as my church's governing body has voted to open our parish hall to serve as an overnight shelter to 4 families, 24 people, who will sleep on our floor because THERE IS NO ROOM at the inn, or at the family shelter, or anywhere else in the city God has called me to serve.

This is a crisis. It is winter. We don't ask hundreds of people to go without heat or sleep outdoors in Maine in the winter.

This is not what my seminary training prepared me for. I was prepared to preach, teach, evaluate Sunday School curriculums, make hospital visits. Instead, I find myself serving as a social worker, searching for shelter, coming to Augusta to pray, talk to senators and representatives, gather signatures, and call for political action.

I am doing what I can. Trinity is doing what it can. And I tell you the truth, there is still no room at the inn.

Please, we need you to do what you can. Pass LD 3.