

# Testimony 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

December 20, 2022

Dear Senator Jackson, Representative Talbot Ross,  
and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee:

Here it is, just a few days before Christmas, on the day when we observe the Solstice and step into another winter in Maine, and I am writing 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.

Both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures remind us that one of the roles and responsibilities of government is to provide for the common good — to care for those who are struggling, who are experiencing vulnerability, who struggle to make ends meet. As we brace ourselves for another Maine winter, in a time of rising costs and financial hardship, we must do everything we can to ensure that the residents of our state have access to the very basics of shelter, heat, and food.

As you know, some of the people who are facing the very real and very terrifying possibility of homelessness are families who have fled their home countries, who have found safety and refuge in Maine. Over the past 10 or 12 years, I have heard many of their horrifying, heartbreaking stories of rape, torture, violent threats, and loss of life, often perpetrated by agents of their own corrupt governments. Time and time again, I have also witnessed their incredible faith, their resilience, their hope for the future. I see their passion, their resolve, their desire to live productive, contributory lives. Our immigrant neighbors are a blessing to our state.

Immigrants and Maine-born neighbors alike, all over this state, from Portland to Presque Isle, from Bethel to Bangor, from Madawaska to Machias, from Lewiston to Lubec, from Kittery to Kingfield, our neighbors are struggling to afford heating oil to provide for their safety and comfort this winter. All over this state, our neighbors are at risk of eviction, as rent increases, as the cost of food and heat increases, as economic insecurity increases. You have the ability to make a tremendous difference — to provide relief and security and stability when Mainers need it most. There is no question — this is the morally and ethically right thing to do.

Those who are struggling, who are terrified of homelessness and the inability to heat their homes, are our brothers, our sisters, our siblings. They are made in the image of God, just as you and I are. Regardless of where they were born, today they are here — Maine residents, living in our cities and towns, participating in our faith communities, going to our schools, forming social connections, volunteering their time, and contributing to our communities in myriad ways to help make Maine a stronger state. Some of our neighbors have needs, but all of us have assets to share, as well. Providing assistance today will pay enormous dividends in the future.

As a nonprofit and religious leader, let me be clear: While churches and other charitable organizations do what we can, we are already stretched nearly to the breaking point. There is absolutely no way we would be able to respond if a flood of families are suddenly unable to pay their rent or heat their homes in an emergency. The scope of the need before us is much too big for Maine's faith communities and nonprofits to handle on our own.

Denying our sisters and brothers assistance will not make their need for heat or shelter evaporate; it will simply leave them homeless, hungry, and destitute. The results would be catastrophic. Please do the right thing: pledge your support for LD 3. I am praying for you as you deliberate.



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