



York County Community Action Corporation

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

Senator Jackson, Speaker Ross, and Members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs:

My name is Carter Friend and I am the Executive Director of York County Community Action. Our organization provides a range of health, education, and social services to the people of York County, Maine, including administering the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) and the Emergency Rental Relief Program.

I commend the Committee for taking bold action to address the basic needs of our neighbors, especially those who are elderly, those with low incomes, and those at risk of losing their housing during this winter season.

As we all know, we are facing unusually high heating costs this winter. The Governor's Office of Energy tells us that the average cost of a gallon of home heating fuel in Maine is currently \$4.50. This means that, for a typical homeowner, a single tank of oil will cost over \$1,200. Our organization provides heating assistance to a high volume of households each year, including thousands of seniors living on Social Security. The average Social Security benefit for a retiree in Maine is about \$1,400, which means that this year, for the first time, the cost home heating can devour nearly an entire month's income.

LD 3 will go a long way toward ensuring that Maine's most at-risk households are protected from the harsh conditions of a Maine winter. Importantly, the bill includes resources for those who do not meet the stringent eligibility requirements to receive benefits from the federally funded LiHEAP program. Many Mainers have income that puts them just over the eligibility guidelines for federal help, but is not sufficient to cover the cost of filling their oil tanks. The inclusion of assistance for these households is a critically important element of LD 3.

LD 3 also includes funding to stave off the looming calamity hundreds of Mainers are facing with the exhaustion of federal emergency housing support. Many of these are families with small children or are senior citizens. General Assistance administrators have been sounding the alarm for weeks, as requests for housing assistance spike. LD 3 addresses this, and if passed, will give lawmakers time to thoughtfully devise meaningful and longer-term solutions to Maine's housing crisis.

Thank you, as always, for your hard work on behalf of Maine's people.

Respectfully submitted,

Carter Friend, YCCAC Executive Director