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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

Greetings, President Jackson, Speaker Talbot Ross and Honorable members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. I am Bridget Quinn, Associate State Director of Advocacy and Outreach for AARP Maine. On behalf our more than 200,000 members statewide, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony in support of LD 3 today.

The devastating economic effects of COVID-19 continue to jeopardize Mainers finances. Now many are at risk of not being able to adequately heat their homes this winter or afford their housing costs.

I would like to call your attention to PART A of LD 3 which will help fund critical emergency housing. In 2023, AARP predicts nearly 1,300 individuals will experience homelessness from all ages, nearly 609 of those individuals will be 50+. Further, approximately 2,160 individuals will be evicted from their homes with 964 of those individuals being 50 or older.

People of all ages need safe, decent, and affordable housing. Emergency housing programs have provided a lifeline to Mainers since the start of the pandemic. It is critical LD 3 is passed to support those individuals and avert a crisis.

Next, I would like to address PART B of LD 3. Utility rates are an essential pocketbook issue for Maine residents 50-plus and their families, many of whom struggle to pay their utility bills along with other household expenses like food and medicine.

In Maine, approximately 21% of our 355 thousand Social Security Beneficiaries rely on the program for 90% of their income. Nearly, 53% of beneficiaries rely on the program to be 50% of their family's income. Those on a limited income cannot afford to heat their homes this winter with rising costs and need support.



Price increases have a greater impact on older consumers and households with lower incomes. When home energy prices are high or unpredictable, older adults may be unable to adequately heat their homes. Such exposure can lead to a host of adverse health outcomes. These can range from the aggravation of chronic health conditions to even premature death.

LD 3 will provide much needed relief to Maine Families, particularly those who live on low and fixed incomes. We are advocating that this relief be allocated equitably. The current thresholds for annual income for relief is much higher than it needs to be.

Household with a low income are at risk of suffering all winter. We appreciate the work of this committee and members of the legislature to develop this relief program. Relief must be equitably distributed supporting Mainers at the highest risk of harm first.

We urge this committee to support LD 3 to provide support to Mainers as we enter our coldest months. We emphasize the need to ensure equity in this process.

Thank you for the opportunity to testified and for this Committees continued work.

If you have any questions, I can be reached at bquinn@aarp.org or at 207-272-8563.

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