

Tracey Hair
H.O.M.E. Inc.
LD 3

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify 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” I am Tracey Hair, Executive Director of H.O.M.E. Inc. which serves low-income and homeless families in Hancock County.

This LD is vital to ensuring that Mainers are safe and warm this winter. We certainly all know the prohibitive cost of heating fuel this winter. When you also consider the current inflated costs of electricity, food, and housing, it is simply too much for Maine households to afford. Many of our neighbors, friends, and community members do not know how they are going to cover these costs and, at this moment, if and how they will be able to heat their homes for the next many months. This LD is essential to keeping Mainers warm this winter.

Particularly critical aspects of the LD are 1) the transfer of \$40mm from the unappropriated surplus of the General Fund to Maine State Housing Authority to supplement the Low-income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding to keep our lowest-income Mainers warm, and 2) the transfer of \$10mm to help households that are not eligible for LIHEAP stay warm ~ these are the households who are one step away from poverty.

H.O.M.E. Inc. has been doing this work since 1970 – Over the years we have witnessed the shifting environment as more of our neighbors fall into poverty. Many of our staff have worked at H.O.M.E. Inc. for more than a decade and have observed a steady increase in people needing help. **THIS WINTER WE ARE RAISING THE ALARM.**

Not supporting emergency housing assistance is not an option. The shelters in our communities across the State are facing unprecedented capacity challenges. We must respond to this crisis quickly!

As you enter the State House on Wednesday, December 21st, let's not balance the budget on the backs of our neighbor's safety and security. Please support LD 3 and ensure that both heating assistance and emergency housing assistance are included so that Mainers are safe and warm this winter. As a provider of emergency shelters for people experiencing homelessness, I understand and appreciate how precious tax dollars are and we take our responsibility to steward funding very seriously.

Thank you for your hard work and commitment to the people of Maine.