

TESTIMONY OF SUSANNA RICHER

IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 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"
Committee On Appropriations & Financial Affairs,
December 21, 2022

Senator Jackson, Representative Talbot-Ross, and honorable members of the AFA committee,

I was deeply disappointed to watch the Senate vote on L.D. 1. I hope this public hearing will provide you with enough feedback from Maine citizens to meet the burden of proof required to pass L.D. 3 immediately.

If there is any doubt that the proposed emergency housing and heating funds are desperately needed, I invite you to spend a few hours walking around the streets of Portland. Everywhere I look, there are people living in tents. They are camped out in parking lots, on wooded trails, in the parks and sometimes tents are set up right on the city sidewalks. I have also encountered people living outside with no form of shelter at all. The knowledge that so many citizens are outside in the rain, cold and snow weighs heavily on my mind.

Up until a few days ago, there were approximately 10 people living in the Falmouth Walmart parking lot. Most were staying in vehicles, but one couple was living in a tent. On Sunday, the police gave the "campers" notice to leave the premises. On Monday, almost all of them had disappeared. I saw the young couple that was living in the tent, standing on Route 1 with what belongings they could carry, trying to figure out where to go. Having no form of transportation, they were forced to leave their tent and some belongings behind. Where will they go? How will they stay dry in the upcoming storms without their tent? Seeing my neighbors live like this fills me with sadness and feelings of hopelessness.

A [recent article in the Portland Press Herald](#) featured a disabled U.S. veteran, a single father with two children, living in a school bus in Androscoggin County. He lost his apartment because of a leak that went unfixed for over a year. The landlord ignored requests to repair, and the leak became severe enough that the father had no choice but to call code enforcement. This action resulted in his family's eviction and eventually led to a disabled veteran and two children living on a bus. This is unacceptable.

Housing and heating should be a human right. Leaving people unhoused and cold is not only inhumane, but expensive and a burden on taxpayers. [Studies have shown](#) that providing housing with support services is less expensive than the shelter, criminal justice, health care, emergency room, and behavioral health costs government agencies incur caring for those who are unhoused.

Over the next few days, while enjoying safety and warmth at home, I hope everyone on this committee will take time to really think about those living outside or without heat as another major storm hits our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Susanna Richer
Portland, Maine

Sources:

A bus for a home: 'If it's cold, I'm up checking on the heater all night long', Portland Press Herald, 12/18/2022
<https://www.pressherald.com/2022/12/18/a-bus-for-a-home-if-its-cold-im-up-checking-on-the-heater-all-night-long/>

Study Data Show that Housing Chronically Homeless People Saves Money, Lives
<https://endhomelessness.org/blog/study-data-show-that-housing-chronically-homeless-people-saves-money-lives/>