

Maine Climate Action **NOW!**

To: Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

From: Maine Climate Action Now

Date: December 21, 2022

Re: Testimony in favor 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

Senate President Jackson, Speaker Talbot Ross, and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Amy Eshoo. I am a resident of North Yarmouth and Director of Maine Climate Action Now (MCAN), a statewide coalition of 14 grassroots organizations with memberships throughout the state. We fight for climate justice in our unified response to the climate crisis. 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.

As a coalition we support legislation that is equitable. This bill has the potential to impact Mainers' ability to keep and heat their homes; to help people in a time of crisis. Everyone deserves a safe, affordable home and one for which they can pay rising heating costs. There is the need for including funding for both heating assistance and emergency housing assistance in this emergency relief package.

The federal rental assistance program, known as the Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) is expiring this month and this will impact thousands of families across the state. The expiration of this program is an equity issue that concerns us. It impacts Mainers of all backgrounds, immigrant and non-immigrant alike.

Rent has become unaffordable for nearly half of all Maine tenants. A study published this year by Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies

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indicates that 41.1 percent of tenants in the state are cost-burdened by rent, with almost 20 percent being “severely” cost-burdened.¹

The housing crisis in Maine is already at an all time high with unhoused Mainers facing the reality of spending nights outside in below freezing temperatures. The demand for beds for the unhoused is outpacing the supply. If we don’t fund emergency housing assistance this demand will reach an even more dangerous level. We recognize that this bill is only a temporary measure and that until we address these systemic issues we will return to this crisis point again and again. But money is needed now to help Maine families avoid homelessness.

MCAN knows that transformational changes to bring energy equity to Maine are necessary. In the meantime this Committee has an opportunity to address the current crisis of on-going volatile and high costs of fossil fuel heating oil. These costs are coupled with the high percentage of old housing stock in need of weatherization and energy efficiency in Maine. Low-income residents need help to survive the increasing extremes and severity of winter brought about by climate change. Money is needed so Mainers can better afford their energy costs and so that we can ensure that our most vulnerable citizens are able to stay warm.

We are in an emergency situation and the funds are available to help. As we all work together in the future we can address the larger issues that have brought us to these dual crisis situations. MCAN urges the Committee to support this legislation and vote OUGHT TO PASS for LD 3.

¹ Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University 2022 report, <https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/state-nations-housing-2022>

Amy Eshoo
Maine Climate Action Now
LD 3

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