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December 21, 2022

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”

President Jackson, Speaker Talbot-Ross, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, I am Senator Ben Chipman and I represent the people of Senate District 28, which includes part of Portland.

As an East Bayside resident, I have seen first-hand the extent of the crisis in Portland; that there are people living on the streets and in their cars, with unbearable temperatures. With the rising heating costs and the mounting housing crisis, it is clear that the Maine people need assistance now. I cannot stress enough the importance of the passage of this emergency bill to provide Mainers the help they need to survive. I have heard from a constituent who had to tell their 8-year-old why some of their classmates had no safe place to sleep. I also received an email from a fellow Portland resident who said:

“Since you live in Portland, I know you're no stranger to the issues that we are facing here with not enough housing, rents soaring, and inflation. Even with a job that pays me a living wage and affordable housing, I'm still struggling to pay for heat, but I know I'm lucky. But it shouldn't have to do with luck. Maine can be a difficult place to live, especially in the winter. We have an obligation to make sure that people's basic needs are met.”

It is not just the people of Portland who are struggling; the entire state is hurting. We see our neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family members struggling with the harsh arrival of winter. As another constituent said, “Our most vulnerable neighbors and family members should not fear for their lives or make impossible choices between food, shelter, or heat. I am shocked at the lack of willingness to give year round residents the literal cold shoulder and sentencing them death.”

With such strong bipartisan support, I urge the committee to vote in favor of this bill so that we can deliver the urgent and life-saving assistance that the people of Maine desperately need and deserve. Thank you for your time.