

Testimony in Favor of LD 3
Dec. 21, 2022
Rev. Allison Smith

Neighbors Need ME <https://www.neighbors-need-me.com/signatures>



President Jackson and Speaker Talbot Ross, and distinguished Committee members, thank you for taking up this vital piece of legislation. My name is Rev. Allison Smith and I am one of the leaders of the faith-based movement called Neighbors Need ME. I live in Harpswell, ME and I am testifying in support of LD 3. Four weeks ago people of faith from all across Maine came together as “Neighbors Need ME” because our neighbors wherever they live in Maine are facing unprecedented desperation and the Senate and House are able to help. It is cold. People are not able to find wood or pay for the next 100 gallons of oil. And many (at least 8500 families) literally have nowhere to go as rental assistance funds end. The shelters are full. The overflow warming center is full. As you know, most of our communities don’t have homeless shelters.

Because of this crisis 770 clergy, individuals, churches, synagogues, non-profits, organizations signed a letter calling on your support of this bill which I emailed to President Jackson and Speaker Talbot Ross on Swearing In Day. People of faith from Fort Kent to Lewiston to Sanford are asking you to support LD 3 and help our neighbors.

I urge you with people of faith and goodwill all across Maine to pass LD 3 immediately. Our neighbors need us to help--like the mom from Pittsfield with five children who emailed us after hearing of Neighbors Need ME. On Dec. 31 she is going to be on the street with nowhere to go because the shelter cannot take a family that large. Or what about the families in Oxford sleeping in cars or a woman in Cherryfield trying to stay warm in a poorly insulated Home Depot shed? Or what about the young couple who have an 8 month old or another who has a 12 month old. How do these babies survive outside? The family shelter has been full for two years. The warming center is full and there is no other place for them to go. Let me say this again. There is no place for them to go.

Our church right now is helping to house 4 families, but this is a band-aid. Our church has also had a Wood Bank for the last 17 years. We have fielded more calls from people all over Maine this year than any other year. We are now out of wood. Last month we delivered a cord of wood to a woman in Gray who was heating her house with her oven. These are our neighbors!

I urge you, as you have identified, to work immediately on a coordinated long-term solution! We have got to find sustainable housing solutions by April because as you know, it is still cold in April.

I believe Maine is and can be the kind of state where neighbors help each other wherever they live in Maine and however long they have been here. I urge those of you who are really wrestling with supporting this to look in the eyes of the families and children who are facing homeless or who are homeless now. I'd love to introduce to them. Just call me or email me. By the way, it is Christmas. It is Hanukkah. It is the Longest Night and soon it will be a New Year.

This is the time of the year in my tradition and many others, not to kick our neighbors out of the shelter they have, or leave them in the cold—it is a time to “Love your neighbor” no matter who they are and treat every single neighbor with dignity and compassion. You have the power as leaders to help our neighbors—the people of Maine.

Rev. Allison Smith
Harpowell
LD 3

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