



PORTLAND
Regional Chamber
of Commerce

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**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**

Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
December 21, 2022

President Jackson, Speaker Talbot-Ross and members of the Committee on Appropriations,

My name is Quincy Hentzel, and I am the President and CEO of the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce. We represent 1,300 businesses in our region who employ over 65,000 Mainers. We are submitting this written testimony today to express our organization's strongest support for the proposals in LD 3.

We are appreciative of the efforts of this new legislature to prioritize the items in this bill, including emergency energy and housing assistance as we face unprecedented challenges caused by inflation, the pandemic, and the surge in people experiencing homelessness over the past three years. In Portland, throughout this difficult time we have been uniquely impacted by increased homelessness and arrivals of both domestic and international homeless individuals and families.

For the Portland regional business community, it is essential that this acute housing challenge be solved to avoid mass unsheltered homelessness during the winter months. We must avoid the negative and harmful impacts of unsheltered individuals, such as increased use of over-stretched emergency medical systems, increased reliance on jails and law enforcement to act as social workers on the streets, and the impact to our next generation of schoolchildren who need stability in where they live and learn.

We also have a long-term opportunity before us with this bill. You all know that Maine was suffering with structural demographic headwinds due to our aging population even before the pandemic, a situation that has only been magnified as people have accelerated their departures from the workforce. These individuals at risk of homelessness, especially those coming from foreign countries with advanced professional degrees and experiences, are part of the answer to those problems, but they cannot become contributing members to our community and economy if they do not have the basics of shelter over their heads.

We recognize that this is a short-term fix to interrelated long-term problems that have impacted our state. We have enormous amounts of work to do to address our expensive and volatile energy supplies and our structurally underbuilt supply of housing. We support efforts to address these challenges, including increased energy generation and transmission capacity, zoning reform and public-private partnerships to build new housing, and other measures to combat macro-economic headwinds caused by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Unfortunately, none of those solutions are immediate and all will take diligent work by this Legislature and future ones over many years and months. We thank you for your time and commitment to all Mainers, and we ask for your expeditious approval of this important legislation.