

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Cheryl Harkins. I reside in South Portland. I'm an Advocate with both Homeless Voices for Justice and Homeless Advocacy for All. I'm also on the boards of the Statewide Homeless Council and Maine's Continuum of Care. I am also a renter. Rental prices have skyrocketed. Many landlords have unfortunately changed attitudes toward what their tenants need in order to safely live in their structure. We all suffered during the pandemic, but tenants should have a right to communicate with their landlords without fearing constant retaliation or threats of eviction when you've done nothing other than point out your needs to the owner of the property.

I'm a 100% physically disabled person who shares a duplex with her son who is also 100% disabled. We live in a community called Redbank. It was recently purchased by a company called JRK Holdings from Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, California. This person laid a new set of rules we are forced to agree to in order to be allowed to sign our 58-page lease; including losing many rights we are guaranteed under state and federal law. We get no repairs, no safety guarantees, and no responses from the office. There's a list of people who this happens to. The only change I have seen the company make is to build a new "center" near our rental office complete with a boxing ring and pool tables. It's gotten so out of hand that the South Portland City Council help workshops and decided there can be a rental increase cap of 10% yearly for landlords who have more than 12 units. My son and I exist on SSI payments and Section 8 Housing. Landlords are slowly catching onto the idea that if you don't care for a person's request or need for something truly important to be fixed you can be simply told to go away. The problems can be covered until the next tenant complains and is told to "move along". Large corporations from out of state have been increasingly buying communities and outpricing the tenants to further gentrify out areas. I'm paying over 1,700 a month plus utilities and my home isn't safe. I am constantly cleaning black mold only to be told that it is not there.

When JRK Holdings bought Redbank Village, they immediately tried to raise all rent by \$1,500 per unit. They initiated extra fees whether they were in the lease or not. There is a rental portal that mysteriously works for some and not for others. There is a fee for paying your rent and if you aren't able to access the rental portal, you have to acquire a cashier's check, as they will no longer accept a money order. When all of these changes started taking place, I attended a tenant's informational at the Redbank Community Center and later spoke of the trouble our community has had to face. I was due to re-sign my lease. It was removed from the online portal after I spoke out. I was unable to sign my lease and Redbank would not communicate with South Portland Housing. I was issued an eviction notice for non-payment of rent. JRK Holdings tried to evict me for the government's portion of my rent. My portion, including the new amount, has been paid every month, including during the government shutdowns. I went to court and explained this to the judge. JRK's landlord maintained I had paid my rent. The eviction was dismissed. I know when my lease is up again they'll most likely want me "on my way" because I have spoken out. I'm too old to live outside again, and my son's health wouldn't allow such a thing. Please protect renters from having a spiteful landlord or corporation put them out on the street needlessly. Please vote to pass LD45. Thank you.