

Testimony from the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition regarding:
LD2: "An Act to Address Maine's Housing Crisis"
Sponsored By: Representative Rachel Talbot Ross
Public Hearing: Tuesday, April 4, 2023 at 1:00pm

Dear Members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing:

My name is Tobin Williamson and I live in the city of Lewiston, Maine in Androscoggin County. I am the Advocacy Manager with the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC), a statewide network of almost 100 member organizations all working to enhance the lives of Maine's immigrant communities.

Maine is in the midst of a housing crisis. You already know this. Affordable housing, luxury housing, single-family housing, multi-family housing, Portland, Lewiston, there is a shortage everywhere and people are suffering as a result. People who do not have housing often have other challenges, involving various facets of life such as healthcare, transportation, employment, childcare, language access, or any number of topics. But it often comes down to housing first. If you have a stable housing situation, chances are you can work to address the next levels of needs. That is why this proposed legislation is so important.

One of MIRC's strongest partners in both the advocacy and housing sectors is Preble Street. When they say the solution to chronic homelessness is site-based housing first, we believe them. With housing first, people can then access the wraparound supportive services they need to take the next step. Trained staff from places like Preble Street are able to meet people from vulnerable populations in rural, urban, and suburban communities where they are and help them move forward in their journey to stability.

For people from the immigrant communities we serve, we have found that moving from shelter to shelter, from hotel to hotel, comes at the expense of stability in education enrollment, employment opportunities, and healthcare access. Many asylum seekers are unable to gain a foothold in their new country because they never know where they will be sleeping the next night. If they had a place to call home, it would mean the world to them and their family.

Expanding the site-based Housing First model would be a step in the right direction for addressing Maine's housing situation. Therefore, we highly encourage the passage of LD 2: An Act to Address Maine's Housing Crisis. Thank you for your consideration of this important and urgent matter.

Tobin Williamson
Lewiston, ME
MIRC Advocacy Manager

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