

April 14, 2023



Dear Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing,

My name is Michael Beck, and I'm the Advocacy Team Lead for Dignity First, a Bangor-based nonprofit, working to create and sustain a village of no-barrier, recovery-oriented, permanent supportive housing for unhoused people and intentional neighbors. We are writing to express our strong support of LD 226 and urge you to vote ought to pass on this bill.

LD226 is not just a bill. It is an opportunity for the state of Maine to make a profound and lasting investment in its people. For too long, affordable housing has been an elusive dream for many Maine residents, including those in the Greater Bangor area. As a recent study by the Bangor City Council has shown, the need for affordable housing is dire, with a projected funding shortfall of \$26.2 million over the next 5 years for workforce housing alone.

Since 2009, the City of Bangor's Fiscal Report shared simultaneously a slight increase in foreclosures and lien rates and an essentially slowed or flat rate of new housing construction. Further, the City of Bangor conducted an extensive housing study in 2019. Having reported Maine's housing stock is older than the rest of the country (75% of homes were built before 1990 vs. 68% nationally), the longitudinal unaffordability of rental units, and the lack of data and accountability for the quantity, quality, and safety of units, the Housing Workgroup recommended taking swift action to create and implement an affordable housing production plan. For years, the City of Bangor has reported lack of financial resources hinders planning and development of affordable housing.

The current vacancy rate for rental units in the city of Bangor is less than 5%, which is, in reality, even lower for people with low or no income, criminal history, low or no credit, previous evictions, or are currently unhoused. Despite the reported Housing Choice Voucher waitlist of more than 15,000 applicants, those who do have vouchers in this area are unable to use them due to a lack of housing options. For example, in June of 2021, Penobscot Community Health Care (PCHC) granted over 150 housing vouchers to applicants, yet only seven were able to be used.

The creation of affordable housing is not just about building new structures. It is about providing a foundation for dignity, security, and opportunity for our fellow Mainers. LD226 represents a critical step towards addressing this urgent need. By investing in affordable housing, we can ensure that Mainers have access to safe, stable, and affordable homes. This will not only benefit individual families, but also have ripple effects throughout our communities and economy. Affordable housing means more money spent in local businesses, fewer evictions, healthier residents, more job opportunities, and increased revenue for municipalities. LD226 is an investment in the people of Maine, and the benefits will be felt for generations to come.

We urge you to support this critical bill to make affordable housing a reality for all Mainers.

Thank you,
Michael Beck



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