



April 13, 2023

Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine testimony to the Committee on Housing in support of LD_226: An Act to Address Maine's Affordable Housing Crisis.

To Chairperson Pierce, Chairperson Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing.

My name is Rebekah Lane and I am the Community Organizer for Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine. I am here today to express our support, and ask for your support, of LD 226: An Act to Address Maine's Affordable Housing Crisis.

The mission of Good Shepherd Food Bank is to eliminate hunger in Maine by improving access to nutritious food for people in need, building strong community partnerships, and mobilizing the public in the fight to end hunger. Good Shepherd Food Bank works in partnership with nearly 600 organizations to help distribute food to community members in need. Our network of partner agencies includes food pantries, meal sites, senior centers, school programs, and healthcare facilities. In our work centering equity, we are increasingly working with communities of color to address food security in a culturally responsive way.

We believe there is a solution to the problem of hunger in Maine. Working in partnership with the state legislature we can and will help reduce the impact of hunger in our state and make Maine a stronger, better place to work and live.

As this committee has heard from me before, hunger and housing are incredibly intertwined and bidirectional, especially in the case of affordable housing. It is right there in the name, housing that is affordable so that decisions between food and shelter don't need to be made.

I would like to share with you a glimpse into Kali's life. She works for a homelessness organization here in Maine, she is a single mother, graduating with a Master of Social Work in a couple of weeks, and she is facing the decision of uprooting herself and her child from the area she grew up in, the place she has called home her whole life, because the cost of rent has grown to the point that she can't afford to live where she works. She is someone who is working to house others, to help them have the dignity of stability and housing, and a lack of affordable housing is putting her at risk.

Speaking of stability, homelessness, and affordable housing, I would like to introduce you to Karlee, a member of the Advocacy Advisory Council at the food bank. Karlee had been homeless for the last 4 years, I say had because just last week she was able to move into her own apartment, something that she had come close to giving up on due to the lack of affordable and safe housing in our state.

During the four years she was homeless, Karlee was granted a housing voucher, unfortunately she wasn't able to use it. She was limited to \$1250/month in the Portland area and was given a double sided list of housing organizations and private landlords to contact. Karlee contacted everyone on that list over the next

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180 days, barely receiving any calls in return and none of them leading to her find housing due to the financial limits of her voucher.

After spending three years living in a shelter, and the year prior living in her car, Karlee told me today “I don’t just have a place to live, I’m home.” And that home is bringing something Karlee has been looking forward to for such a long time, cooking for herself, and the dignity of choice with her own food.

Affordable housing means that people like Kali, Karlee, and so many others, aren’t faced with the choice between two basic needs, food and shelter.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

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