

Testimony of Tori Collins
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Testimony in Support of LD 1514, An Act to Provide Safe, Short-term Housing to Individuals
Recently Released from Correctional Facilities
April 27, 2023

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Victoria Collins, and I am a resident of Old Orchard Beach. I currently attend Maine Law, and in 2019, I taught logistics and math in a medium security men's prison.

I ask that you vote "ought to pass" on LD 1514. By providing support to indigent individuals returning from prison, this bill will increase stability among those re-entering, reduce recidivism, and strengthen our communities.

Finding housing is a particular challenge for those re-entering. Recent research shows that upon release from prison, one-third of individuals struggle with housing instability, and around ten percent are unhoused within a year.¹ Among other factors, because of skyrocketing rents² and the fact that most "[m]en and women released from incarceration . . . are usually employed in low-wage jobs,"³ indigent individuals walk an especially difficult road when seeking housing. Housing instability is associated with increased recidivism;⁴ thus, the struggle to find housing is a public safety issue.

Private housing is difficult or impossible for re-entering individuals to secure "because basic prerequisites are often out of reach (i.e., reference letters from previous landlords and deposits)."⁵ Private landlords can also, of course, bar anyone with a criminal record from renting with them, or pick and choose which criminal histories they will accept and which they will not.⁶ It is thus clear that re-entering individuals—especially those with little money to work with—face significant barriers when it comes to private residences. A two-month period of guaranteed shelter would provide those seeking private housing with much-needed time to find a landlord who is willing to accommodate their needs.

Of course, one cannot speak of indigent individuals seeking housing without speaking of subsidized housing. During a summer internship with Pine Tree Legal Aid in 2022, I was tasked with writing a plain-language guide to subsidized housing for those re-entering our communities from prison.⁷ This work was often difficult and confusing for me, a top fifteen law student. Imagine, then, how frustrating and time-consuming it must be for someone with no legal background, who is already facing many other significant stressors, to navigate the complexities and fully understand the procedural and substantive ins and outs of the program. To take all this on while also seeking employment, rebuilding relationships with family and friends, and

reestablishing trust in the community is a near-Herculean feat. A buffer period of two months would provide at least some of the extra time needed when applying for subsidized housing with a criminal record.

Overall, this bill would provide needed security and peace of mind for individuals re-entering our communities—individuals who already have so much on their plate that it is difficult to conceptualize. This bill would also stabilize and strengthen communities by reducing recidivism. For these reasons, I ask that you vote “ought to pass” on LD 1514.

¹ Leah A. Jacobs & Aaron Gottlieb, *The Effect of Housing Circumstances on Recidivism*, 47 CRIM. JUST. BEHAV. 1097, 1098 (2020).

² Sam Olsen, *Rent Costs Are Increasing Nationwide, and Maine Is No Exception*, NBC NEWS CENTER MAINE (July 21, 2022) (“Maine has [] seen a 39% increase in rent since the COVID-19 pandemic started”).

³ BRUCE WESTERN & CATHERINE SIROIS, *Racial Inequality in Employment and Earnings After Incarceration*, HARV. DEP’T OF SOCIO. at 1 (2017), https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/brucewestern/files/racial_inequality_in_employment_and_earnings_after_incarceration.pdf.

⁴ Leah A. Jacobs & Aaron Gottlieb, *The Effect of Housing Circumstances on Recidivism*, 47 CRIM. JUST. BEHAV. 1097, 1099 (2020).

⁵ *Id.* at 1098.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ I am happy to provide this guide to the Committee upon request. However, please note that PTLA, not I, owns the final product.