

I am opposed to LD 1904.

My business provides rental housing in the greater Waterville area. There are many reasons why my business may choose not to rent to those with a criminal history. We make these choices not only to protect the welfare of the business and its employees, but also the welfare of the tenants.

My best friend is a tenant living in a multi-family in Veazie (to be clear, she does not rent from my business). She has two children ages 3 and 9. She frequently complained of pot smoke from the tenants in her neighboring unit and saw them smoking outside. She also once overheard a loud argument in which one tenant accused the other of “leaving drugs out where the children can get it.” Eventually, Child Protective Services removed the neighboring tenants’ children due to parental substance abuse. I would argue that this was not a safe environment for my friend’s children due to the proximity of the other tenants. In my business, I would not place someone with a criminal background of drug dealing in a multi-family dwelling in order to protect the other tenants. Tenants are powerless to choose other tenants; it is the responsibility of my business to select the best tenants. I would similarly never rent to a convicted sex offender in order to protect the other tenants, nor anyone with a significant history of assault, theft or vandalism that I felt may endanger others. Why should my business wait until the end of the rental application process to check criminal history when clearly certain criminal histories can be non-negotiable reasons for denying a tenant? Why does the state believe that the rights of criminals are more important than the rights of law-abiding citizens to safe housing? What will the liability of my business be if we knowingly place dangerous criminals in our rentals, and something terrible does happen? What will be the liability of the state?

There have been times in this business when I have feared for my husband. My husband deals with tenants directly face to face. We have had, very, very aggressive tenants who are quick to verbally escalate any and all misunderstandings. These people did not have a criminal record. Does the state expect us to house criminals with a significant history of assault, and then have my husband deal with their behaviors?

Forcing landlords to wait until the end of the application process to check criminal history only creates processing delays and delays the placement of desirable tenants. Processing a rental application takes multiple hours in order to review the background check, the credit check, the rental history, review income, and to call references. My business does not bother proceed with the entire application if the criminal history suggests harm may come to others. Delays cost money, as rentals go un-rented and landlords have to either spend more time themselves or pay their property managers for additional hours processing applications. This leads to more costly rents as lost time loses the business money.

Vote no on this bill; it endangers both landlords and tenants and will ultimately increase the costs of renting in Maine.

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