

Cheryl Harkins
South Portland
LD 1490

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. Good afternoon. My name is Cheryl Harkins. I am an advocate with Homeless Voices for Justice. I am also on the boards of the Statewide Homeless Council and Maine's Continuum of Care. I am speaking to you today in support of LD 1490. I reside in South Portland in a community named Redbank. This particular property was purchased approximately one and a half years ago by JRK Holdings (which has since rebranded to the name Two Coast Living). Their headquarters is on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, California. Since the property transfer some people who have lived here for over 30 years have had to leave because of the immense rent hikes and extra fees on top of the signed leases that the new owners imposed. The portal needed to pay the rent rarely works. You're only other alternative would be to buy a cashier's check for an extra \$15 from the bank. Instead of repairing the cracked foundations, leaky cellars, and mold throughout the apartments they choose to build a recreational center complete with pool tables and boxing ring. An attempt by the owner to immediately raise all 500 units' rent by 25%. This prompted emergency city council action by capping rents at 10% increase per year maximum for owners who had more than 15 units. Two Coast Living was the direct cause for this rental cap.

Additional fees that Two Coast Living has imposed are pest control fees of close to \$20 monthly even though they only check once yearly, a CAM fee (COMMUNITY AREA MAINTENANCE FEE) of between 60 to 65 dollars monthly, a "We can mow your lawn without a notice" fee of \$150, and the newest fee, a "non-compliance fee" of \$60 a monthly for not having apartment insurance. Many people like myself have been getting charged at \$60 fee even though I do have insurance and have had since we moved in approximately 8 years ago. I even had my insurance agent fax my cover sheet to the offices of Redbank to be sure they had the proper information. When they kept charging me I was told that they have not had a working fax machine for well over a year. I didn't go to backup email of two or three other steps I need to follow to a different email address but this time I am supposed to forward my complete policy to accompany that does nothing but try to rip me off. How could I possibly trust giving a complete insurance policy to an email address that is run by people who I have no idea who they are! With the behavior of this company in the period of a year and a half how would I possibly trust giving an open policy for them to use at will. If we do not comply with everything we are told then we are threatened with non-renewal of our leases as well as having phrases used such as "you will if you know what's good for you." Background checks cost \$75 per person.

It's important for you to know that I am on Section 8 housing and I have a lease that clearly states "NO EXTRA FEES". Every instance I have described happened since JRK Holdings purchased Red Bank in South Portland. I am elderly, 100% disabled, and I exist on a little over \$800 a month. It's next to impossible to save any money for a security deposit. Statistically speaking Maine is lacking at least 20,000 units of housing. I am yet to be able to find anything affordable because of the prices landlords have started asking for their apartments. There is not enough affordable housing that is going to be available for years. There are people currently living in tents or vehicles who are working full-time jobs and going home to attend or a vehicle. Agency funding are running dry. There are many landlords who are kind and sometimes are willing to work with tenants but unfortunately we have others who do not care about anything more than their bank accounts. A bit of reality needs to take order. I would like to thank Representative Christopher Kessler for caring about the hardships of the people of the State of Maine.

One more thing. This testimony is also on behalf of the 35 or so people who live in my community who don't dare to come forward for fear of retaliation or eviction. Please vote ought to pass LD1490. Thank you for your consideration.