



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Committee on Housing
From: Philip Mathieu, Legislative Team Volunteer, Sierra Club Maine
Date: May 19, 2023
Re: **Testimony in Support of LD No. 1905, "An Act To Create a Residential Rental Unit Registry"**

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Committee Housing:

My name is Philip Mathieu, and I write on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nationwide as we work towards combating climate change and promoting a just and sustainable economy. **To that end, we urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1905.**

In addition to my role with Sierra Club, I serve on the Portland Rent Board. While most of the media coverage on Portland's rent ordinance centers on debates around policy and implementation, to the best of my knowledge nobody has questioned the value of collecting registrations and associated data as a necessary step toward understanding the rental housing market and informing future changes in housing policy.

While there may be some concerns around implementing a new, statewide administrative process, it is important to keep in mind that the actual requirements proposed by this law are extremely limited. The information required is substantially less than what is required to file for taxes, for example. Additionally, by setting a threshold of 50 units before a filing fee is assessed, the law would ensure that there will be no added cost for the small-business landlords in our communities.

Lastly, I believe that this registry could prove invaluable to municipalities that do not otherwise have the capacity to maintain their own rental registries. I have lived or worked in Saco, Biddeford, and Cape Elizabeth, all smaller towns that feel similar housing market pressures to Portland but do not collect rent data. The proposed registry could prove an invaluable step towards more regional approaches to planning.

While my testimony so far has focused on my personal experience, it is notable that Sierra Club sees many specific ways that this legislation would help further our state's environmental goals. For example:

- Weatherization of our housing stock is perhaps the single most important thing that Mainers can do to reduce energy consumption and meet our climate goals. A central rental registry would help Efficiency Maine direct resources for renters to specific addresses where those resources are needed, rather than relying solely on self-service tools like their website.

- Similarly, future renewable energy initiatives such as residential solar siting could be guided by knowledge of the rental housing stock.
- Finally, and perhaps most generally, the more we know about the current housing landscape, the better we can craft policies to address current and future housing crises in ways that address both community and environmental priorities.

While the members of Sierra Club Maine are united in our support for environmental issues, we are also united in our identity as Mainers. We share an interest in addressing homelessness, affordable housing, and other related issues for the sake of our communities, not just for their environmental impacts. There is much work to do, but collecting more data is one important step in the right direction.

Sincerely,

Philip Mathieu

District 5 Representative, Portland Rent Board

Legislative Team Volunteer, Sierra Club Maine