



Maine People's Alliance

Sen. Pierce, Rep. Gere and honorable members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, thank you for the chance to present to you today. My name is Cate Blackford. I am the public policy director of the Maine People's Alliance. MPA is Maine's largest grassroots organization with over 32,000 members, from Kittery to Fort Kent. We are fighting for a world where everyone has what they need, contributes what they can, and no one is left behind.

MPA strongly supports the goals of LD 2158, to increase the flexibility of the Section 8 program to respond to today's rapidly rising rents and limited inventory. Housing vouchers are an incredibly effective tool to reduce housing instability with many additional benefits on health outcomes, education, and economic opportunity.¹ Yet, as you all are well aware, and has been documented by Maine Housing and others, the wait for a housing voucher in Maine is typically 5-7 years. The Bangor Daily News published a story just yesterday detailing the hardships faced during such long delays.² After facing such long waits, a high percentage of voucher recipients are unable to use them to secure housing. This is due to many factors, including "landlord reluctance",³ as well as practical concerns like not being able to find accessible homes, homes with enough bedrooms, or available homes at the right price, in the right location, in the allotted amount of time.

The goal of LD 2158 is to ensure price, location, and timeline are not barriers to people being able to make use of the vouchers they have waited so long to access. While Maine doesn't have the authority to redesign the federal program from whole cloth, the flexibility that LD 2158 requests Maine Housing pursue on behalf of themselves and the other housing authorities across the state could help thousands of families secure the housing they desperately need.

Given the high rate of at which such a critical tool is being rendered impotent, tasking Maine Housing with researching when and why our vouchers are not working, across different rental markets, is crucial. A centralized process for gathering data on our rental housing markets and responding accordingly is more efficient and helpful to our overall need to understand the different barriers people face to securing safe, stable housing they can afford. I urge you to charge Maine Housing to pursue that

¹ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/research-shows-housing-vouchers-reduce-hardship-and-provide-platform-for-long-term-gains>
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC955591/#R21>
https://www.macfound.org/media/files/hhm_-_housing_choice_vouchers_slightly_better_work_prospects_disadvantaged_families.pdf

² <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2024/01/29/state/state-housing/mainers-are-waiting-years-for-federal-housing-aid-joam40zk0w/>

³ <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/9118>

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flexibility, whether locally or federally, and bring back their recommendations for state-level changes as proposed legislation.

The data is clear that stable housing, and its protections against the stress and uncertainty of frequent moves or the fear of losing one's home, provides a sense of security and continuity that allows children to focus on their education and development. Children who experience housing instability are more likely to experience negative outcomes, such as poor academic performance and behavioral issues. When we invest in rental assistance to create housing stability, that eases the financial burden on families, helping reduce parents' stress and freeing up resources to invest in children's needs such as education, healthcare, and extracurriculars. We all benefit when we relieve this burden.

We know that housing vouchers are one of the clearest means to creating housing stability for Maine families. We owe it to them to address the barriers that keep it from serving our neighbors as intended. I urge you to support the goals of LD 2158 and maximize all available opportunities to tailor the program to meet Maine's needs.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to take any questions.

Cate Blackford