



2/22/2024

Support for LD 2214

Honorable members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee,

My name is Craig Saddleire, and I am the Development Organizer for the Raise-Op Housing Cooperative. I strongly urge your support for LD 2214, *An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government... for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025*.

The bill includes many important investments in housing and resources for people who are homeless. In your consideration of the details of the bill, I strongly urge you to create a well-funded rental assistance program that helps Maine's most vulnerable residents. Maine's low-income tenants most in need of affordable housing cannot actually access the new affordable housing without rental assistance. Rental assistance is central to addressing our housing crisis, and it should be at the top of any economically realistic housing policy agenda.

Our organization recently developed 18 new affordable housing units in Lewiston, and received over 500 applications for just these 18 units. The demand for affordable housing is staggering. Amazingly, we processed over 100 of those applications before we could find just 18 households that we could match with the affordable units. Most of the applicants were declined because their income was too low to afford the rent, and some applicants who technically qualified for the units decided themselves that they could not quite afford them. This is because the rent charged for affordable housing - while restricted within an "affordable limit" - is still driven by the costs to operate it, which is out of reach for many low-income Mainers. A vast majority of the qualified residents who were able to move in to the new units did so because they have rental assistance. The lesson here is that without rental assistance, most low-income Mainers cannot afford the new affordable housing that is being constructed.

Furthermore, rental assistance also increases the consumer power of tenants. In doing so, private housing developers and managers will become responsive to that consumer demand, and become more incentivized to develop housing that meets the needs of low-income tenants. If we want to house everyone, we need to offer everyone an ability to pay for that housing. Rental assistance achieves that. General Assistance does not meet this need, as the program is not designed appropriately for housing, and is not reliable. Low-income tenants utilizing General Assistance are typically declined from new affordable housing for having an unreliable income source.

I understand LD 1540 takes a good step towards trying to address the housing affordability gap. I urge the AFA Committee to enhance and amend LD 1540 to create a more robust rental assistance program that will include adequate assistance for households below 30% AMI. This is the only way to prevent their displacement and end this growing homelessness crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig Saddleire". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Craig Saddleire
Cooperative Development Organizer
Raise-Op Housing Cooperative
145 Pierce Street, Office 102
Lewiston, ME 04240