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Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Selection Committee on Housing: my name is Annie Hikido. I am a resident of Waterville. I am also a professor at Colby College and an urban sociologist. I am here to testify in favor of maximally investing in safe and affordable housing.

We are at a turning point. Since I moved here in 2019, I have witnessed major transformations in Maine's landscape. Last year, I spent my sabbatical in the California Bay Area, where I am from. I returned to find the globally recognized tech capital teeming with encampments on the streets, under highways, and in river banks. Car-jacking is normal. The first thing my mom told me when I pulled into my childhood home was to buy a "cat-scan," which prevents theft of a car's catalytic converter, which can be resold for cash. Commuting eats up most people's lives. Living in central urban areas where most jobs are located is no longer affordable, so those who are lucky enough to secure employment spend much of their day in transit. If they are driving, this contributes to environmental pollution and increased risk of traffic accidents. If they rely on public transportation, they are left with barely any time outside of work because multiple bus and metro transfers eat up their mornings and evenings.

Maine is not California. But when I returned this fall, I saw signs that augured the same trajectory. In Portland, I saw new encampments next to the highway on Marginal Way – an aptly named street for those who no longer have stable housing. In Waterville, I saw a shiny new cinema and arts complex and pricey new gift shops that targeted those with disposable income. Without regulation, this development will raise rents and threaten evictions and displacement.

These processes are already in motion. We need to provide rental assistance and regulate the housing market. We cannot let Maine go in the dystopic direction Silicon Valley has. Thank you for your time.