

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Select Committee on Housing: my name is Patty Kidder and I live in the village of Springvale located within Maine's newest city, Sanford.

I am a long time volunteer member of MUUSAN, the Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network, and MPA, Maine People's Alliance. I know that both organizations stand behind me in the belief that Housing is a Human Right, just like clean safe drinking water and having enough food to eat.

Housing insecurity is at epidemic proportions in our state and across the country. We can not wait for a solution from Washington, DC, when more than half of our lowest income families are paying more than half of their income for rent. The trauma families experience living through housing instability with the cycles of eviction and homelessness and having to start their lives all over again and again, has a life long effect that makes it next to impossible to break the cycle of generational poverty. The human cost of doing nothing to help with rent relief has a ripple effect that destroys lives and reduces the number of workers available to fill the positions that local businesses are desperate to fill.

Without a safe place to sleep at night, every night, people can't keep their jobs or concentrate on their education while trying to improve their situation. All they can do is try to figure out how to survive for another day and find somewhere to put their children to bed that night. Rental assistance for our lowest income Mainers is the best tool we have to combat this problem here in Maine.

At the start of the winter season, Sanford had 155 people living either in tents or their cars. I have no idea how many other people are in danger of losing their housing but to me, even one is too many and we know there are many more than just one. Our cities and towns especially, can not afford to use their entire General Assistance

budget to help our lowest income neighbors pay for housing while the state has a large surplus that could easily help.

When my husband lost his job when Spencer Press closed its doors in June 2009, we experienced our own housing instability when his unemployment ran out. We thought because he was trained in Information Technology (IT), that he would land another job in no time but he was partially disabled and all a prospective employer could see was how their health insurance costs would increase and he never got a second interview.

Our housing costs compared to our monthly income skyrocketed to over 75% and if we didn't have friends and family to help us pay for our housing, I'm sure we would have become homeless. Because we were able to get the help we needed to stay in our home, we have been able to slowly increase our income and now our housing is affordable for us at just under 30% of our fixed monthly income, but I had to retire early to make that security happen. We were very fortunate to have people in our lives that could literally pay our housing costs for us for **5 years** while we filed for my husband's disability benefits.

Most low income Mainers do NOT have a network of people wealthy enough to help them get through the hard times. They look to our "safety net" of public assistance to stay housed. When we needed it, before I turned to friends and extended family for help, we discovered that net had huge holes that whole families could fall through. Those holes still exist and the numbers of families needing help is on the rise. Doing nothing, is not an option any more. The human cost is way too high and studying the problem doesn't help anyone in the immediate future. I'm asking you to think about school aged children wondering during class, whether their front doors will be paddle locked when they get off the bus. Think about the single parents trying to make sure that doesn't happen to them while trying to go to college to qualify for a better job. No one can concentrate on work and education when they don't know how long they will have a home. The mental health costs are way too high and the message low income

Mainers hear is that society doesn't care to help them survive and we want them to go away and die.

I can't believe that we all want them dead so they don't cost us anything. I think we have been brainwashed into believing we can't afford to help them and to me, **we can not afford to NOT help with rent relief**. It appears to me to be the best way to help our lowest income Maine families stay housed and able to do what it takes to start ending the cycle of generational poverty.

I am asking you to please work together and pass a bill to expand rental assistance to our lowest income families and help them stay housed. For our lowest income families, there is no such thing as affordable housing anywhere in our state. You have the power today, to save lives. I know you can't save everyone but that doesn't mean you shouldn't help those you can.

Thank you for your time and service to the people of Maine.

Sincerely,

Patty Kidder

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