

February 22, 2024

Dear Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and Honorable members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs,

I am writing in support of using *additional* money from the Governor's Supplemental Budget for items the Housing Committee has recommended be approved, along with the request from Maine Affordable Housing Coalition (MAHC) which asks that there be an *additional* one-time investment of approximately \$20 million to be split between Maine Housing's Rural Affordable Rental Program and the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program.

I have sat in on many of the Housing Committee Meetings over these last two sessions (as a volunteer with AARP Maine) and witnessed their thoughtful and diligent review of the many proposals for improving the supply of housing as well as improving the rental situation across Maine. What that committee requests will have been a result of very serious deliberations and deserves full support. I realize that there are *many* competing and worthwhile interests before you, some with heartbreaking backstories. However, I firmly believe that Maine cannot move forward to address any of these (including child abuse, substance abuse, mental health, or the retention of teachers, child care and health care workers) without first making a much larger financial commitment to the housing situation across Maine. Yes, the Governor and State Legislature have finally begun to address this crisis but it requires an even larger, and braver, commitment to actually push the needle forward.

We simply can not continue to have students living in cars and motels or shelters; elderly losing their homes or apartments; people working full time who still can't afford housing; young people starting out in life who can't find an affordable place to live; and Maine losing workers who can't find places to live near a potential employer.

There are developers and a variety of creative options (such as the multi-family modular units built in Western Maine) in the pipeline that could help address the severe shortage of housing we are experiencing. But we need to help fund and support projects, including rental relief, at a much grander scale, while still being rigorous in our demand for accountability and standards.

I am a retired school counselor who dealt with many social and economic issues over the course of 30+ years; I also worked several years in the juvenile justice system. My experiences taught me that we can't be successful in addressing higher needs without building a firm foundation first. **Housing** is the mainstay of that foundation. Please support bolder and braver financial commitments to the housing requests before you.

Thank you so much for the hard work and difficult decisions you have ahead of you.

Pat Wright

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