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LD 963

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Testimony IN FAVOR of LD 963 An Act to Standardize Subsidized Housing
Application Forms
Committee on Housing and Economic Development

(I intended to testify in person but after the fire alarm delays on 3/18 I needed to leave to attend to other matters. This is the testimony I would have read.)

My name is Susan Clark and I live in Sidney. Last year one of my relatives became suddenly ill and subsequently disabled. He was not able to return to his aging and dilapidated house in northern Maine. He needed a subsidized apartment.. He's not someone who is very good at paperwork or at managing a bunch of computerized applications - and he would be the first one to say so. I took on the job of helping him with his finances, his healthcare and his housing.

Applying for what used to be called Section 8 was surprisingly simple. However it was imperative that I also help him apply for other kinds of subsidized housing. We have family spread out around the state so we were willing to look at quite a wide geographic area. I am not easily overwhelmed but I soon found this process overwhelming.

I want to give a shout out to Mattson apartments. They own a large number of apartment buildings spread over a wide geographic area. I was able to fill out just ONE application form with Mattson and check off the apartment complexes my relative wished to be considered for. That was by far the simplest process. But then, as I moved on, I found other companies that had multiple apartment complexes but required a separate application for each one. Different companies required different information. Some required references at this first stage and others didn't.

Perhaps the most frustrating was a company that had an online application, but I had to fill out that same application for each of their locations over and over, the only difference being that I had to assign to each of those identical applications a different username and password.

I guarantee you the relative I was helping could not possibly have kept this straight by himself. I could barely keep it straight on his behalf. One might say "but they probably have caseworkers who could help fill this stuff out." In our case, we didn't. For those who do, most caseworkers are funded directly or indirectly with government funds. Is it really a good use of their time to fill out multiple copies of the same application form all going to the same company?

I was about at the end of my rope with this when I read in the Boston Globe that the state of Massachusetts has recently gone to a streamlined system with ONE standardized application form. I would ask committee members to do three things: click on the links at the Maine State Housing web page, open up the application forms for three or four different companies in your district and see what it is like to wade through the housing application process.

Second, look into how Massachusetts streamlined their system with one application form. Third, if that method is not viable for Maine, consider working with the landlords to encourage adopting a process more like Mattson's, without duplicate forms and multiple passwords. Thank you.

It can be done and it should be done. Thank you.