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Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Honorable members of the Housing and Economic Development committee.

My name is Deqa Dhalac, and I have the honor of serving the good people of District 120 in South Portland. I am writing today in strong support of LD 1287, a vital piece of legislation that will help advance housing stability and strengthen Maine's workforce.

The housing crisis in Maine, and particularly in South Portland, is deeply affecting families and workers. It is a key factor contributing to the labor shortage, as too many residents are struggling to secure stable housing. While long-term strategies are important, we also need immediate action to prevent further homelessness and offer critical support to those at risk.

According to the Maine Development Foundation, the state's labor force declined sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we've seen signs of recovery, challenges persist, especially as our population ages and younger workers face economic barriers. If we want to attract and retain a robust workforce, we must invest in housing solutions that make it possible for all Mainers to live and work here.

LD 1287 takes an essential step in that direction. It provides rental assistance to households earning less than 30% of the area median income—supporting those who are often excluded from traditional housing programs. By focusing on prevention of eviction, the bill helps reduce homelessness, stabilize families, and allow individuals to maintain employment and contribute to the economy.

In South Portland, we see every day how stable housing the foundation of a strong, reliable workforce is. This bill aligns with our shared economic goals by supporting workers who are essential to our communities but face growing housing insecurity.

The structure of LD 1287 is both compassionate and practical. By empowering the Maine State Housing Authority to work with local partners and by keeping administrative costs low, we can ensure that more resources go directly to the renters who need them most.

Programs like those proposed in LD 1287 have already shown great promise in Southern Maine and Androscoggin County, helping workers access housing through security deposits and short-term assistance. These efforts have made a real difference, and LD 1287 would build on that success statewide.

By passing this bill and creating the Housing Stability Support Program and Housing Stability Fund, we can help keep families in their homes, support our workforce, and strengthen Maine's economic future.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and commitment to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Deqa Dhalac