



LD 1522 – An Act to Establish the Maine Eviction Prevention Program

Testimony of John Brautigam, Esq. for Legal Services for Maine Elders
Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

April 25, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development.

My name is John Brautigam, and I am here today on behalf of Legal Services for Maine Elders. LSE provides free legal help for older Mainers when their basic human needs are at stake. We support LD 1522.

Our clients are dignified, proud, and resourceful – but also vulnerable. Many live on fixed incomes, facing health challenges, and at increased risk of housing instability. The pilot initiative has been instrumental in preventing homelessness among low-income renters, including many older adults.

LSE has been at the forefront of assisting older Mainers in accessing the Eviction Prevention Program. Our attorneys work diligently to inform clients about the program, assist with applications, and provide legal representation when necessary. Our efforts have been bolstered by the program's existence, enabling us to offer more comprehensive support to those at risk of eviction.

One story illustrates the benefits of this kind of support. In recent years LSE helped one long-time client through two evictions, one of which was prior to the EPP. Howard¹ had recently lost his sister who was his primary caregiver. Howard has severe mental health diagnoses and cognitive deficiencies, rendering him unable to manage his finances or day-to-day activities without assistance. He was evicted from private housing (without cause) and ended up in a motel in a small town in western Maine.

While at the motel, Howard was struggling to find permanent housing and was also struggling with a large arrearage owed to Medicare. With so much going on, client was not able to pay his monthly rent, and the motel served him with an eviction notice. In November 2024 LSE applied on his behalf to the EPP and he received his approval letter in January 2025. EPP paid client's rental arrearage of over \$6,000 and is currently paying \$800 per month for a few more months at which point he will

¹ Elements of this client's story have been altered to preserve confidentiality.

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need to recertify with EPP to possibly receive additional assistance. The motel dismissed the eviction proceeding and Howard continues to live there while looking for permanent housing in this challenging housing market. Separately, LSE worked with him to resolve his Medicare arrearage and line up insurance going forward. He now qualifies for a permanent case worker to help him manage his challenges. In short, the EPP was instrumental in helping Howard step back from the brink of homelessness.

We have many clients facing circumstances similar to those Howard was facing. Some of our clients face these challenges despite already receiving the benefit of subsidized housing. The benefits of the current pilot project, however, are limited. They are not available to those in subsidized housing or using a voucher. We understand the justification for this restriction, but we would like the committee to know that it has proven to be a significant barrier during the short existence of this program.

The program has been in high demand. The overwhelming response underscores the urgent need for such assistance and the program's role in addressing housing insecurity. The need won't be resolved any time soon. Continued investment, combined with integrated legal aid and case management services, could provide a holistic approach to preventing eviction and promoting long-term housing sustainability, ensuring that older Mainers can age in place with the stability and security they deserve.

Thank you for your mindful consideration of the needs of these fellow Mainers.