

Esteemed members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee. My name is Lucas Schrage and I am the Director of Housing Initiatives at Quality Housing Coalition. I am testifying in support of LD 1522.

I have the privilege of overseeing all of QHC's housing programs, including the Eviction Prevention Program. The EPP processing team members are among the most intuitive, deeply compassionate, efficient, innovative, and empathetic human beings that I have ever worked with and I could not have asked for a better group to serve as stewards of this incredible program. I have watched them work tirelessly to keep Maine's residents from being pushed out of their homes onto the streets in the dead of winter. "No" is not an acceptable option to these people and watching them formulate solutions to unsolvable housing predicaments knowing that they are the last line of defense before homelessness is awe inspiring to the say the least and has been nothing short of a pleasure. To them, any household evicted from their unit is viewed as a personal affront to the program's integrity and prompts reconfiguration of internal processes in hopes to better serve the next applicant that comes through the portal.

Yes, this program is imperfect, as all pilot programs are. Yes, it is a drop in the proverbial bucket of housing solutions for the state of Maine in the midst of a housing crisis several orders of magnitude larger than what this program is equipped to address. But ahead of these points, it is a lifeline to hundreds of households who were not forced from their homes. It keeps Maine's rental housing stock in the hands of locals and out of the clutches of private equity. It prevents personal health problems from festering, and keeps Mainers in their housing and out of hospitals, shelters, and incarceration. As a refined tool working closely in tandem with countless other housing and housing-adjacent supportive programs, the Eviction Prevention Program has been and continues to be a triumph; instilling in me the hope that some of these people will never again have to see the inside of an eviction court.

There is no off switch to Maine's housing crisis. The solution will be an amalgamation of innovative efforts across many years from different angles that must be properly evaluated and adequately replenished as needed. I can stand here today and continue to speak to you in tired platitudes, but what I really implore you to do is closely examine the statistical impact that this has had on a county level. In an era of belt tightening, I encourage you to see these measures for what they really are: preventative medicine. Upstream investments in your constituents in a way that can be seen tangibly in substantial drops in shelter use, emergency services, and general assistance, whose administrators have touted the benefits of this program with more fervor than any other group that I have met with since its launch.

With the remainder of my time, I would like to share the words of a man named Lukau, who was courageous enough to share his experiences in support of efforts to extend the benefits of this program to so many other families just like his. His written testimony has been translated into English:

"Upon arriving in the state of Maine, we encountered many difficulties, with the most pressing being the search for a place to live and the challenge of paying rent. After the loss of our 3-year-old son in 2023, we decided to emigrate to the USA in hopes of finding a health solution for our 11-year-old son, who also suffers from sickle cell anemia.

Our primary focus upon arriving in the USA, particularly in Maine, was to perform a bone marrow transplant for our son. We dedicated all our time and physical and financial resources to this cause. Thanks to the state of Maine, organizations like MaineHealth, and MaineCare, we learned about a free bone marrow transplant program for patients with this condition at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston. With the assistance of organizations such as Hope Acts and Quality Housing Coalition, we managed to secure a 3-bedroom apartment in Portland, Maine, after a few months. Our son requires special attention now after undergoing the bone marrow transplant, which he would not have been authorized to receive if we had not found and kept our housing.

However, we incurred significant debt when the organization that was helping us with rent payments halted support after we used our remaining financial resources to purchase a vehicle. This vehicle was

necessary for various medical consultations and exams with doctors in Maine and Boston for our son. Following the loss of our rent support, we fell into substantial debt with our landlord, who subsequently sent an eviction notice. After explaining our circumstances, the landlord was sympathetic and allowed us to stay for a little longer in the hope that we would find employment.

Feeling upset and worried about our situation, we sought assistance from various sources. We discovered the EPP project through a news report on television. We immediately contacted Quality Housing Coalition, which provided us with detailed information and helped us register and apply online. Fortunately, some time later, we received the wonderful news that our case had been approved. Thanks to the tremendous commitment and dedication of QHC, we received confirmation that our debts would be fully settled, amounting to approximately \$4,800. We were allowed to stay in our home. We are incredibly grateful for the existence of organizations with this mission. We sincerely hope that this project continues, as we know that many other families need similar assistance. Thank you to everyone who contributed directly or indirectly to this project.

Thank you very much!

Lukau”

Thank you again to the committee for your time and continuing service to your constituents.

Lucas Schrage

Director of Housing Initiatives

Quality Housing Coalition