



Maine People's Alliance

Senator Curry, Rep. Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Cate Blackford and I am the Public Policy Director of the Maine People's Alliance. MPA is Maine's largest community action organization, with over 32,000 members across the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today about LD 1806.

This bill became a priority for MPA after conversations our members had three years ago with housing navigators about their work trying to connect people with stable housing. We started meeting with them to understand the specific barriers they and the people they were trying to help find housing face, and how we could help. The contact information for local landlords was a vital piece of information they were missing in their search for potential homes for people in their communities.

We had also learned through our work on efforts to help the state establish regional housing goals that one of the key pieces missing from Maine's ability to effectively plan how to meet the our housing needs, is accurate, accessible information about the housing we have versus the housing we need, especially when it comes to Maine's renters.

If we had that information, it would not only be of great assistance to planning how to meet our housing needs, but would also help a multitude of other efforts.

Housing navigators wouldn't need to wait for listings to post to find out which landlords they should build relationships with. Program officials could better get the word out about the resources and opportunities they offer to tenants and landlords. First responders would have better information when helping in emergencies and landlords and other real estate investors would have better data on local markets.

It is my understanding that Portland, Orono, Sanford, Lewiston, Bar Harbor and Waterville have long term rental registries, though there may be others. Overall, the data has been a valuable resource to those communities.

In Orono, which created their registry in 2008 to get a handle on the issues related to having a large renter population, the vast majority of whom are college students, everything was paper files and checks. Now their registration is all online and tied into their permitting software. There was some initial pushback from local landlords, but the program has paid major dividends. They use the information to track trends and address quality issues. They use it to track where students tend to be living and how that impacts town planning for other services. Because such a high proportion of their renters are students, they also use the database to help make sure

these new renters, sometimes living on their own for the first time, know what their responsibilities are as tenants. While landlords were initially skeptical, especially of “what was next”, they have not had any issues with compliance and instead meet regularly with landlords to talk about what they’re seeing and experiencing. The fees collected cover the administrative costs.

The town of Bar Harbor has four rental registries for different types of housing: short term rentals, employee living quarters, shared accommodations (e.g. dorms), and a registry of long-term rentals. When the program first began it was also on paper forms and was a lot of data entry, but now is mostly online processing. The data has been a huge help for their planning purposes. Their code enforcement officer said that while they can’t take a position on legislation, she would be happy to speak with the committee during the work session to share more of their experience.

If we have local registries, why do we need a statewide database? First, even if every major community in the state had a registry, we would still need to compile and compare that data statewide for planning purposes, to track trends in Maine’s rental market, and to get the word out about programs and opportunities for landlords and tenants.

We also can’t expect smaller municipalities to have the capacity to create their own registries. This data will give cities and towns a leg up on addressing their housing needs. By asking those investors who hold the most market share in Maine to support the administration of the registry with a small fee, the state would be following standard practice and achieve numerous benefits for a multiplicity of stakeholders.

I expect that you all will hear opposition and caution today about the work needed to create a registry and the burden it will put on the state and landlords. We are open to ideas about the most effective way to do that work. However, I also want to emphasize that while this would be a new project, there are numerous models for how to collect, manage and offer access to this kind of data. Given that there are lessons to be learned both from municipalities in Maine, other state agencies and other agencies outside of Maine, we are confident that this is a very achievable goal and well worth the effort.

This data is a key tool for us to accurately and effectively plan and would be a major boost to new and existing programs to support communities and landlords.

I urge you to support LD 1806 and am happy to take any questions.

Thank you for your consideration.