

Susan Friend  
Maine People's Alliance  
LD 2212

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development: my name is Susan Friend and I live in Waterford. I am writing today to testify neither for nor against LD 2212.

All Mainers deserve safe and affordable housing. That shouldn't be a controversial statement.

I work in the mental health and substance use field and often, what I encounter on a day-to-day basis for the people in my community, is the opposite of safe and affordable housing – if they have housing at all. We know that the very basic requirement for a person to achieve any kind of healthy and productive life, is for them to be housed and fed. That's the minimum and far too frequently I meet people who cannot even begin to access these two things.

I urge you to fully fund emergency rental assistance in the Eviction Prevention Program. This program has been widely successful in keeping people in their homes. Survey results show that seven out of eight participants maintained their housing after engaging in the program. Furthermore, 70% of applicants found the process easy to navigate, praising the straightforward instructions and helpful staff.

Maintaining tenancy or having access to affordable options for housing is a huge step toward recovery for a person who may be struggling with the effects of mental health and/or substance use disorder. If someone cannot financially afford the peace of mind that comes with knowing they've got a safe place to rest their head at night, it's very difficult to instill in them and maintain hope for the future.

In addition, at a time when we have great economic and political uncertainty, and thousands of Mainers have lost income out of fear of leaving their homes, this program is more important than ever to fully fund.

I also appreciate the Governor's proposed shelter funding and urge you to include that funding in the supplemental budget, along with additional funding to fully support our shelter system, such as the funding proposed in LD 2124. Funding for housing is essential to Maine families and communities. I also urge you to raise revenue and reject Trump's cuts to guarantee essential programs like housing. Please include LD 1089, 229 and 1879 (or better) in the budget.