

**Testimony in Support of  
LD 45, An Act to Prevent Retaliatory Evictions  
February 9, 2023**

Good afternoon, chairpersons Carney and Moonen, and all members of the Judiciary committee:

My name is Josie Phillips, and I am representing Maine Center for Economic Policy. I am testifying in favor of LD 45, which makes it easier for renters to prove an eviction filing to be retaliatory if it occurs within six months of the renter exercising their legal rights. By placing the burden of proof on the landlord rather than the renters, LD 45 empowers renters to exercise their legal rights and shelters them from retaliatory evictions that could critically endanger their immediate safety and future wellbeing.

Safe, reliable housing is fundamental to everyone's ability to live a healthy, prosperous life. Evictions remove this crucial source of stability, and it is difficult to grasp the importance of LD 45 without first understanding the threat that housing instability poses to people experiencing eviction.

When people are removed from stable housing, they are vulnerable to health-threatening conditions.<sup>i</sup> These conditions can include asthma, substance abuse and poor mental health, cardiovascular diseases in older adults, and increased transmission of contagious diseases. For youth, housing insecurity is also associated with early drug use and teenage pregnancy. Sheltering families from unprovoked evictions, in addition to making tenant/landlord relationships more fair, is a public health measure.

The consequences of housing instability are not limited to personal health. When people lack reliable housing, they are less able to provide for themselves, in both the short- and long-term. Being forcibly removed from one's home makes it significantly more difficult to maintain a job or find new employment, which contributes to increased rates of unemployment among adults experiencing eviction.<sup>ii</sup> For similar reasons, housing insecurity is associated with worse educational outcomes, which can impact a person's financial security for the rest of their life.

The impacts discussed so far are all related to housing insecurity — which can include rapidly changing addresses or living in unsafe, inadequate housing — but we also know that evictions increase the likelihood of homelessness. Homelessness is severely harmful in more ways than I have time to mention, including elevated risks of trauma, assault, incarceration, and a variety of diseases.<sup>iii</sup> And especially during extreme temperatures, homelessness can be deadly. LD 45 would help to ensure that no one endures the dangers that come with being homeless simply because they exercised their rights as tenants.

Finally, it is important to note that the burden of evictions is not distributed equally. A 2020 study by the Princeton Eviction Lab found that Black and Hispanic renters in Androscoggin county are overrepresented in eviction cases.<sup>iv</sup> Strikingly, while only three percent of renters in the county were Black, Black renters experienced 31 percent of evictions. It is beyond the scope of this committee to resolve the individual prejudices of landlords who racially discriminate, but LD 45 would help protect the renters who are subject to this kind of injustice

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By protecting renters from retaliatory evictions, the bill would preserve our communities' health and security without penalizing landlords who conduct their business honestly and fairly. Because of the significant benefits to impacted families and the limited costs to landlords, I urge this committee to vote yes on LD 45.

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<sup>i</sup> Health Affairs, "Housing And Health: An Overview Of The Literature." <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hpb20180313.396577/>

<sup>ii</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>iii</sup> Network for Public Health Law, "The Public Health Implications of Housing Instability, Eviction, and Homelessness." <https://www.networkforphl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Fact-Sheet-Public-Health-Implications-of-Housing-Instability-Eviction-and-Homelessness.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Eviction Lab, "Racial and Gender Disparities among Evicted Americans." <https://evictionlab.org/demographics-of-eviction/>