



## PINE TREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE, INC.

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In support of LD 2 “An Act to Address Maine’s Housing Crisis”  
April 4, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and distinguished members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing. My name is Katy Childs. I am the Managing Attorney of the Augusta Office of Pine Tree Legal Assistance. I grew up in Windsor, Maine, where I currently live with my family. I have been at Pine Tree for eight years and I have represented tenants across the state.

Pine Tree Legal provides free civil legal services to low-income Mainers. We opened our doors in the summer of 1967 and have been overwhelmed with people in need of our services ever since. We have six offices throughout the state, from Presque Isle to Portland and our staff handle cases in all 29 district courts.

In 2022, Pine Tree Legal Assistance worked on 7,582 cases, providing direct legal assistance on a wide range of legal issues. We are seeing a significant demand for services. In 2022, we handled 12% more cases than the previous year. In 2022, our statewide Call Center received a total of 10,328 intake calls from people seeking representation – an increase of 180% compared to 2019.

Almost every day, Pine Tree attorneys are in courts across the state defending evictions and working with clients who have faced, are facing, or are about to experience homelessness. There are many individuals who require our assistance throughout the years, coming back to us when their housing situations begin to deteriorate. Many of our clients live with chronic mental illness and substance use disorders. We see that the Housing First model can be transformative for people living with these issues.

Lack of mental health services, like MaineCare’s Section 17 case management services, drives our clients into homelessness. Pine Tree is often the mental health service of last resort. When we are in court defending evictions, we see firsthand the intersection of mental health and substance use disorders and housing instability. We are often the ones cobbling together plans to obtain desperately needed services so they can maintain their housing. Our clients need mental health services before they face evictions, and before they become chronically homeless.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments today. I hope you will vote *ought to pass*.