

Mase Peterson's Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing

L.D. 462: "An Act to Assist Persons Experiencing Homelessness in Areas of High Rent by Seeking a Waiver from the Federal Government"; sponsored by Rep. Madigan of Waterville.

Public Hearing: February 14, 2023, 9:00 AM

"Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mase Peterson, I've been a resident of Waterville, Maine for almost six years, and I am testifying in support of LD 462.

First, I'd like to express gratitude to Representative Madigan for sponsoring this bill and for supporting legislation that seeks to address the very urgent housing crisis in this state. Looking at me and hearing me speak today, you would not know my history or identity so I will tell you instead. I was born and raised in western North Carolina with two parents who were both opioid addicts. My mother, like many folks out there, suffered tremendously due to poverty, addiction, economic inequality, and intergenerational trauma; and as a result, she was never capable of owning a home of her own and her children were often at the mercy of an unstable upbringing. One memory I recall, which is to this day one of the most formative out of all my life experience, was the night my mother parked outside on an empty driveway of a tiny church and told me, a kid who couldn't have been more than 8-years old, to lie down in the backseat. I questioned her and wanted to know why we were sleeping in a car instead of a bed. She got defensive and angry, and I could sense that it was because she was scared and humiliated to be my parent. I was a very attuned child but I still believed that our instability, a byproduct of a system engineered to suppress poor and working-class people, was somehow my fault.

And since becoming an adult, I've done everything in my power to make sure I never return to that unstable position. Not due to resilience or courage but out of fear, shame, and paranoia that I might one day go back to being the helpless child with no agency. But it's necessary to understand that the trajectory of my life changed due to two major contributing factors: 1) community support, including family, chosen family, and my friends; and 2) material assistance. Because of these two factors, it is a miracle that I am standing here with you today, a first-generation college graduate who got a job right after school and can now pay their own rent in a disastrous housing market. You may think of people like me as the posterchildren of an American dream but I urge you to hear this, instead, as a dire warning. Without material assistance and concrete solutions like the ones that LD 462 will enable, harmful cycles will continue. Homelessness begets trauma. Trauma begets homelessness. Both are mutually reinforcing forces that have shaped my outlooks of the world and if I had the chance to live my life again without that constant uncertainty haunting me everyday, even if it meant taking away all of my adult achievements, there is no question. If it meant not having to be the one to stand up here today and convince you that this bill is worth considering, there is absolutely no question.

I implore you to support LD 462 and I thank you all for your time."