



Testimony of
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Before
The Joint Select Committee on Housing
In support of
**LD 1422: An Act to End Homelessness and Assist Students Who Are Homeless by
Establishing a Housing Voucher Program and Providing Site-based Housing
Services**

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, I am Erik Jorgensen Senior Director of Government Relations and Communications at the Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing) and I am submitting this testimony in support of LD 1422

An Act to End Homelessness and Assist Students Who Are Homeless by Establishing a Housing Voucher Program and Providing Site-based Housing Services.

MaineHousing has been helping Maine people own, rent, repair, and heat their homes since 1969. We are an independent state authority (not a state agency) created to address the problems of unsafe, unsuitable, overcrowded, and unaffordable housing. We are authorized to issue bonds to finance single family mortgages for first time homebuyers and for affordable multi-family housing.

We are also authorized to administer a number of state and federal programs, including rental subsidies, weatherization, fuel assistance, two housing block grants, the low-income housing tax credit program, and homeless grant programs. We receive state general fund revenue for homeless programs and receive a dedicated portion of the real estate transfer tax for the Housing Opportunities for Maine (HOME) Fund.

LD 1422 is a very specific bill that surgically addresses the problem of student homelessness. This problem is small in terms of numbers involved, but it could not be more acute for the people touched by it. In the original version of this bill, Representative Brennan included a “housing first” component; we understand that this part has been struck, leaving just the student homelessness section intact.

The way we see this program working would be for a school-based McKinney-Vento Coordinator to engage with a housing navigator in order to find a home for a homeless family with a child in school. If both the McKinney-Vento Coordinator and the navigator were to certify that the family could, in fact, move into a particular unit but for a portion of rent, this program could provide rental subsidy to the landlord for a determined amount of time. While procedural details would need to be worked out, we think that this is doable, given the finite number of students who are experiencing homelessness in Maine. Unlike broader rental assistance programs, this would be a highly targeted.

While we support this concept, we should point out the problem of funding critical support services using short-term resources. This bill would rely on a one-time appropriation of rental assistance, which, barring additional legislative action, will end. As we have all seen so painfully with the end of ERA, the end of any benefit program always creates a “cliff” for people who are reliant on a program for something as critical as housing. We don’t think that’s a disqualification, but urge the committee to consider that if they choose to move this bill forward.