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**Testimony of Dylan Maebly, Pine Tree Legal Assistance in SUPPORT of LD 1710, An Act to Establish the Maine Rental Assistance and Guarantee Program and Amend the Laws Regarding Tenants and the Municipal General Assistance Program**

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Good Morning Senator Peirce, Representative Gere, and Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Housing,

My name is Dylan Maebly and I am an attorney with Pine Tree Legal Assistance. I am testifying today in support of LD 1710.

Pine Tree Legal Assistance is a nonprofit organization with offices statewide. We assist with a variety of civil legal issues, with a particular focus on housing cases. My area of practice is within our Veterans Unit, and I run our Medical/Legal Partnership with Togus VA. As a part of this work, I work closely with the VA Homelessness Prevention team, assisting Veterans with a variety of housing related legal issues, including evictions and housing discrimination matters.

For the first five years of my practice, I regularly witnessed how powerful a tool housing vouchers are in the effort to end veteran homelessness in Maine. I worked with countless veterans experiencing homelessness for years or even decades before they were finally able to find and maintain consistent housing with the help of a voucher. I watched as the number of chronically homeless veterans in Maine continued to drop. However, more recently, I have witnessed this important tool slowly lose effectiveness. As housing markets tighten, landlords have more discretion over whom to rent units to, and unfortunately, this is often to the exclusion of voucher holders.

This was never more salient than with an elderly veteran I met through my work at the VA. The veteran had a long history of experiencing homelessness over the last 20 years, mostly living out of his car or camping in the woods. However, this all changed for him once he was identified for a housing voucher, and he was finally able to maintain housing for longer than a few months. When we met, he had been living in his apartment for several years but was notified by his landlord that the building was being sold and his lease would not be renewed. The landlord gave the veteran plenty of notice, close to four months, which in the past would almost certainly be sufficient to find and rent a new unit.

Unfortunately, over the course of those four months, I watched my client lose out on apartment after apartment simply because he was using a housing voucher. My client's voucher went from a lifeline to a proverbial albatross in just a few years. While discrimination based on the receipt of public assistance, including housing vouchers, is already illegal under Maine law in practice, we see it happen every day. Landlords rely on the fact that housing vouchers create additional administrative burdens to deny potential applications. Those administrative burdens include

adding a tenancy addendum to the end of an existing lease or allowing a housing inspection prior to tenancy. In reality, these extra requirements do very little to change the nature or administrative cost of leasing to a voucher holder. An inspection is done by the agency issuing the voucher to ensure that the unit meets certain minimum requirements. All renters in Maine are entitled to similar requirements and anyone can call their local code enforcement office and request an inspection. For voucher holders, this inspection simply happens automatically before the tenancy is established.

LD 1710 would make clear that landlords no longer have the discretion to deny someone like my client the opportunity to rent an apartment, simply because he relies on the assistance of a housing voucher.

Pine Tree Legal Assistance supports LD 1710 because it will provide tenants with protection from discrimination due to their use of a housing voucher. No tenant should lose out on an apartment, simply because they are receiving rental assistance. I urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1710.