

Good afternoon / morning Senator Pierce and Representative Geer, co-chairs of the Committee on housing.

My name is April Tomah. I am here today expressing my support for LD1710. I am the housing navigator for Wabanaki public health and Wellness. I am a Passamaquoddy tribal citizen. I am here today to discuss the housing crisis. I work with homeless every day to try to find a permanent home. There are so many people out there right now who don't have a home. I have clients that have vouchers such as Section 8, BRAPP, shelter plus care, or HCV vouchers, but the prices are so high that they can't get into these apartments. Most of my clients have low or no income. Most of that living streets or couch surfing or trying to make ends meet living in a hotel. Living in a hotel is very expensive. It is near impossible to save for security deposit rent or any other moving expenses. As a housing navigator for tribal members who do not live on the reservation. There's a housing on reservation for everyone. I see the suffering that these people when they have their voucher in hand but are still sleeping on the streets. The rent is so high or just above the limit of their voucher. With LD 1701 we'll make it easier for my clients to find affordable rents. with what landlords and property managers are charging rent is not affordable for many main residents. Even someone who has 2 incomes has trouble affording the rental rate now. Over half of these households pay more and they can afford for rent. When these people pay most of their income for rent other areas suffer, they can't feed their families they can't afford a vehicle to get to work so they can make more money. Mean must bridge this gap to increase stability for renters. There are so many positives that will come from LD 1701 for the was homeless one of these being the ability to support their families and themselves.

There are so many landlords out there that do not accept any kind of voucher and that works against fair housing laws to me this is discrimination. If a tenant has a voucher this is guaranteed money for these landlords. As a housing navigator I believe that this bill will help with the homeless crisis, also this will help the homeless succeed and become self-sufficient. When a homeless person gets a home, and they can have financial stability. Those who can work have an address to put on applications for a job. Those who are disabled have a safe place to be and call home.

We have a lot of clients that have very low or no income. These people cannot pay the amount of rent that are charged by "affordable housing unit". Having a rent relief program helps address the affordability gap to assist these residents that have low or no income in finding a permanent home not having to worry "where am I going to sleep tonight. How am I going to keep my family warm". Those of us who have a home don't understand what being homeless is. Imagine not being able to go home to your nice warm house. Sleeping in nice warm bed have a place to cook your food a safe place for you and your family. to fall asleep and not know if you will wake up in the morning because it's so cold out. This is one of the scariest things that somebody can go through.

I have experienced homelessness after a fire in September of 2022. It took me 4 months to find a place for me and my fiancé and our foster children to live. Having to pay application fees after application fees and then not being approved is heart breaking. It cost us \$5000 to get into the place we are now. we had to pay first month last end security deposit. I don't know a lot of people who have that kind of money just laying around to be able to pay to get into a new place. Even now we struggle. I couldn't imagine trying to do this with less income that I have now.

Thank you for your time. I hope for your support on this important legislation.