

Testimony in support of LD 1710
Belinda Vemba
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Good Morning Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and the Housing Committee.

My name is Belinda Vemba, I am a resident of Westbrook and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1710, the Home Act. You may wonder why I am so passionate about this specific bill. It is because having a place to call home gives a sense of identity and belonging. Passing this bill would mean that families like mine and thousands of others who spend unbearable months in homeless shelters, hotels, and outdoor encampments can get affordable housing. This will ease the heavy load that General assistance is currently shouldering.

Passing the Home Act would mean that Section 8 and GA vouchers for housing will be accepted by more landlords. It would lessen discrimination against people with disabilities and single-parent families who often use these programs and it will push landlords to rent to them. Passing the Home Act will mean that we are all viewed the same as Mainers and not as "those people" or any other group of people who are put in a box. People who apply for apartments will have more equal rights.

The Home Act Rental Assistance Program would help Maine families pay their rent by covering a portion based on their income. Maine families are currently playing a chess game when they have to decide what needs are more important. Passing this bill will mean that families can have peace of mind because they won't have to choose between housing and other necessities like food or heat. This dream can only be reached by helping people pay the difference as we work to lower the price of rent and hold landlords accountable.

Yes, I said it, hold them accountable, because we have too many abusing the rights of tenants and that is not okay. Don't get me wrong, we all have rights including the landlords of these apartments, but we will speak up when other people's rights are looked over.

According to Pine Tree Legal, between 2017 to 2019 a total 12% of the families they represented were non-white, while only 5% of Maine's population is non-white. In the same time frame, people with disabilities made up 28% of Maine's extremely low-income renter households. People who are already facing inequities are the ones also feeling the brunt of this housing crisis. We can do better! It starts with the Home Act and so I stand here today for all Mainers asking that you consider this bill.

I urge you to pass the Home Act and make a difference for the many Maine families who are struggling to make ends meet. We are on the brink of a homelessness epidemic. If we don't act now, it will be too late and generations after us will suffer and will never know the true meaning of how it is to truly have a home. So please, let's stand together and make sure every person in Maine has a place to call home.