

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and honorable members of the Committee on Housing: my name is Lucca Hamina, I live in Orono and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1710.

LD 1710, or the HOME act, is a piece of legislation meant to strengthen housing assistance within Maine and help out renters of all types. I think that I speak for most of us when I say this past year has put at the very least a strain on most of our finances, but for Mainers who were struggling with housing before COVID-19 and massive inflation I cannot imagine the hardship they face today. That is why passing LD 1710 is of the utmost importance.

Over the course of the pandemic we all got a glimpse of our system's lack of resilience. In the face of major societal shake up we saw record unemployment, increases in those unhoused, rent moratoriums to try and manage the economic fallout of a pandemic. I try not to be a pessimistic person, but the world is changing and we need to be prepared for further unprecedented times in the future and start dealing with the unhoused epidemic already here today.

While being unhoused presents a challenge everywhere, Maine is special as for half the year it is not only unsafe to live unhoused, but deadly. Back in February Maine saw a polar vortex which caused temperatures to drop well below 0, during this time the city of Bangor coordinated a response that was mostly championed by volunteers. While I am happy to have been a part of the good-hearted people who helped make sure people could have somewhere warm to go, I am left with one question. Why must it fall on volunteers and other unhoused folks to help in the more dire of circumstances when we could prevent much of this with policy?

I believe the HOME act will help us to do just that by making it easier for renters to rent through barring types of rent discrimination, creating rental assistance programs, and renter protections in case hard times hit them or all of us like they did not more than a few years ago.

Please support LD 1710. Thank you.