



# Maine People's Alliance

Senator Pierce, Rep. Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing. My name is Cate Blackford and I am the Public Policy Director of the Maine People's Alliance. MPA is Maine's largest community action organization, with over 32,000 members across the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support for LD 1710, the HOME Act.

This bill, and the changes it would make to how we support low income renters in Maine, is one of MPA's top priorities this session.

Our members who lead our housing work had an extensive discussion last fall on whether MPA should prioritize working on bills that increase the supply of housing, as we did with our work last session on LD 1656 and LD 2003, or if we should focus on the assistance people need now, as they face the instability and financial stress of rapidly rising rents. By working on rental assistance, we worried we were only working on a symptom of the market's challenges, not on addressing the root cause of a lack of housing. But given the gravity of the impacts of high rents on individuals, families, businesses, schools and our communities as a whole, our members decided this must be a priority. We urge this committee to do so as well.

Our members decided that if we did not support the people facing the worst impacts of the housing crisis, people who are working for low wages or are on small fixed incomes, we are essentially abandoning them. It will take many years before we see the large-scale impacts on the market from the efforts to build more affordable and market rate housing. We cannot ignore the financial, physical, mental, social and economic harms of high rents while we wait.

The beauty of LD 1710 is that not only will it create housing stability for thousands of Mainers in the near term - it will also have broad ripple effects on our communities as soon as it takes effect, and those effects can be lifelong.

We moved a lot, both when I was growing up, and as I was starting my own family. I've seen the toll that changing schools and changing communities took on me and has taken on my eldest. The feeling of being unrooted and without ties makes it harder to weather all the little things life throws at you as you grow up.

The data is clear that stable housing, and its protections against the stress and uncertainty of frequent moves or the fear of losing one's home, provides a sense of security and continuity that allows children to focus on their education and development. Children who experience housing instability are more likely to experience negative outcomes, such as poor academic performance and behavioral issues. When we invest in rental assistance to create housing

stability, that eases the financial burden on families, helping reduce parents' stress and freeing up resources to invest in children's needs such as education, healthcare, and extracurriculars.

According to the Urban Institute, younger siblings who spent more years living in subsidized housing had higher annual earnings by their mid-twenties compared with their older siblings who spent fewer years with housing assistance.<sup>1</sup>

By investing in LD 1710, Maine can have that kind of dramatic, life-long impact on the thousands of kids who are currently living in unstable housing. Over 64,000 renters in Maine pay more than 30% of their income on housing. Over 15,000 Mainers are waiting for rental assistance. According to the latest Kids Count, on January 25, 2022, there were 808 children living in shelters or hotels with their families who were homeless. During the school year, there were 2,142 students in Maine who were homeless or doubled up in overcrowded housing at least one day.

This bill will have a dramatic impact on the lives of those families, and those children's long-term outcomes. It will also create tangible benefits for their teachers and classmates, reduce costs for their schools, and strengthen their communities.

It is hard to stare at the scale of our rent burdened households and feel like it is a problem we are equipped to address. But the interconnected components of LD 1710 - rental assistance, funding from those in the best position to contribute to our housing solutions, increasing the supply of affordable units, and ending discrimination against rental assistance - offer a clear path forward. I urge this committee to make a commitment today to taking action to immediately benefit thousands of rent-burdened households so that together we may reap the benefits tomorrow and in the months and years ahead.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> (Urban Institute, 2021). Source:  
<https://housingmatters.urban.org/articles/how-housing-affects-childrens-outcomes>