

**TESTIMONY OF THE MAINE IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS COALITION (MIRC)
FOR L.D. 1710: An Act to Establish the Maine Rental Assistance and Guarantee Program
and Amend the Laws Regarding Tenants and the Municipal General Assistance Program**

Sponsor: Representative Cheryl Golek
Public Hearing: Friday, May 12, 2023 at 9:00am

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, Members of the Committee on Housing:

My name is Tobin Williamson. I live in Lewiston and I am the Advocacy Manager with the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC), a statewide network of almost 100 member organizations working to enhance the lives of Maine's immigrant communities, thus improving the lives of Mainers overall. MIRC works to advance systemic changes in Maine through collaborative advocacy to ensure that voices of the state's large, diverse, and growing immigrant communities are heard.

Over the past couple of years, Maine's housing market has ballooned for both renters and buyers. Speaking personally, I moved here two years ago and it is absurd how much costs have risen just in that time. Costs have gone up, evictions have gone up, and yet availability has gone down. When my partner and I, who both have stable jobs and a decent household income, had to look for new housing this spring, it was one of the most intimidating and terrifying processes we have experienced. We know we are in a lot better position than others, and that is why I am committed to fighting for better housing options for everyone. Every single day in my work, I am painfully aware of the housing crisis we are in.

MIRC supports L.D. 1710 for a number of reasons:

- It provides more legal protection for renters, joining almost two dozen other states that have passed similar source of income measures which aspire to prohibit discrimination from landlords regarding rental assistance programs such as G.A. or Section 8. Yesterday, the *Portland Press Herald's* Editorial Board shared a piece about the importance of G.A. for Maine right now. As the double whammy of skyrocketing housing costs and soaring numbers of new arrivals strain both local municipalities and human beings, the G.A. program has literally been a lifesaver for Maine people who need it the most. Still, with the federal Emergency Rental Assistance program coming to an end and new housing construction being years away, the needs have never been higher.
- It creates protections for people whose rent is unaffordable, which is an acute problem for people who are legally prohibited from working due to federal policies.
- It uses smart real estate sale tax reforms to create a "Home Opportunity Fund" to help low-income families gain access to housing stability.

We are happy to join partner organizations like Maine Equal Justice in supporting L.D. 1710 and we hope you will, too. Thank you very much for your consideration of this important issue.

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