



Maine

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Testimony of Meagan Sway

LD 853—Ought to Pass

RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Establish a Right to Housing

January 23, 2024

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing, good afternoon. My name is Meagan Sway, and I am Policy Director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, an organization dedicated to advancing and preserving civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions through advocacy, education, and litigation. On behalf of our members, we urge you to support LD 853, which would add explicit protection for one of the most important human rights to Maine's Constitution.

While housing is too often viewed as a mere commodity in the marketplace, housing is most importantly a human right. Housing is the basis of stability and security for both individuals and families. It forms the center of our social, emotional and sometimes economic lives, and provides a place to live in peace, security and dignity. Everyone deserves to have a safe, healthy and stable place to call home. An affordable home should not be a luxury commodity available only to those who are well-off, nor should anyone be priced out of housing and left to deteriorate on our streets or in mass shelters.

Importantly, recognizing adequate housing as a fundamental right in our constitution does not mean the state is obligated to immediately provide a single-family home to every Mainer. Rather, the amendment would require that the state, including its municipalities, takes progressive steps to respect, protect, and fulfill the right, to the maximum of available resources, in a non-discriminatory, equitable manner.

The lack of affordable housing has reached crisis proportions in much of our state. Some of our communities, and our state government are working hard to address the issue. The Mills administration has recognized that "every person in Maine should have the opportunity to have warm, safe, and secure place to call home,"¹ and with the bipartisan support of the legislature, it has helped make more than \$180 million available to improve access to housing. But, some of our communities are not doing enough or, worse, are taking steps to make housing less achievable. That is unacceptable. LD 853 represents a statewide commitment to the importance of housing. It commits us—all of us—to ensuring that all of our neighbors have a place to call home. It is the very least we can do.

We ask you to vote ought to pass.

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/future/housing>