



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002  
(207) 287-1400  
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

## Allison Hepler

417 Montsweag Rd.  
Woolwich, ME 04579  
Phone: (207) 319-4396

[Allison.Hepler@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:Allison.Hepler@legislature.maine.gov)

March 5, 2025

*Testimony of Rep. Allison Hepler presenting*

## **LD 264, An Act to Remove the 12-month Waiting Period for the Maine Resident Homestead Property Tax Exemption**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation*

Good morning, Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier and members of the Taxation Committee. I am Allison Hepler and I represent the towns of Arrowsic, Georgetown, Phippsburg, West Bath and Woolwich. I am here today to present **LD 264, An Act to Remove the 12-month Waiting Period for the Maine Resident Homestead Property Tax Exemption.**

As a long-time Woolwich selectperson, I take municipal budgets and property taxes very seriously and am proud of our ability to keep mill rates reasonable – and flat for 3 years in a row – despite increases in the county and school budgets. And, as is true for all of us in the legislature, I know that property tax relief is often topmost on Maine residents' minds. This bill seeks property tax relief by eliminating the 12-month waiting period for Maine residents to receive the Homestead Property Tax Exemption. This is, quite simply, an effort to simplify the process and make the exemption more accessible to the public.

First, there is the matter of equity. There is no waiting period for new residents who are applying for the Blind Exemption and/or for the Veteran Exemption. As soon as they receive their first tax bill following their applications, those exemptions are applied to their property value.

This bill would do the same for those applying for a Homestead Exemption, which leads me to my second point: the current 12-month waiting period can be cumbersome and overly lengthy. The date of record is April 1. Here are a couple of examples: (1) If you lived in Wiscasset and sold your house in February 2024 but needed to rent until you bought a house in Woolwich in July 2024, your date of record for taxes would be April 1, 2025. That is when the 12-month clock begins so you would not be able to take advantage of the Homestead Exemption until you receive your September 2026 property tax bill. (2) If you moved from out of state to Woolwich in July 2024, you would similarly not qualify until the fall of 2026.

Third, any concerns about whether a new resident is claiming their actual primary residence, or "homestead" is simply and quickly resolved by a phone call by the assessor in Woolwich to their counterpart in the previous town. In fact, that's also how your new assessor determines if your

exemption is portable; if you had a Homestead Exemption in Wiscasset and moved to Woolwich in July 2024 with no break in homeownership, you would receive the exemption in fall 2025. (Compare this to the example earlier about a Maine resident with a short break in homeownership before moving to another Maine town who would have to wait until the following year.) My point is that these questions are easily resolved. Finally, the application form is an affidavit, with the new taxpayer asserting that they're being truthful.

This proposed legislation provides property tax relief more quickly, and it also simplifies the administrative tasks that towns are already providing.

Because I'm a historian, I did some digging to see why this requirement was added and when. According to the quick and wonderful work by the Law and Legislative Library, it has been part of statute since the Homestead Exemption was first included as part of a budget in 1998 in the 118<sup>th</sup> Legislature. As with most budget votes, there were over 30 amendments and while I identified the specific amendment and read through several transcripts of both the House and the Senate debates, I couldn't specifically identify when the 12-month waiting period was added or why. Given my experience here in the legislature, and given the lengthy debates in 1998 on the costs of this new Homestead Exemption, a 12-month waiting period may have been a way to delay incurring the fiscal note. But I honestly don't know.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to try and answer any questions you may have.