

Good morning, Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and esteemed members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee. My name is Kelli Austin, and I live in Waterville. Today, I am here to express my strong support for LD 1522, Maine's Eviction Prevention Program (EPP). This program has proven to be a vital safety net for families across our state.

Can you imagine choosing between employment, rental assistance, or "living off the state"? As someone who has triumphed over homelessness and battled addiction while being a single mother, and who is now a full-time student and a proud member of the Maine Equal Justice Housing Leadership Team, I have worked tirelessly to support my daughter and create a brighter future for our family.

With my dedication and the help of a Section 8 voucher, I secured a home and could finally get a job! Thankfully, right before Christmas, I found part-time seasonal work, but I still faced eviction. My rent tripled shortly after starting my job, yet my earnings weren't enough to cover basic living expenses. Soon, I received an eviction notice, and the end of the work season arrived. I was then out of work and facing eviction, with barely any pennies in my pocket. Was a part-time job worth losing my housing assistance and my home? This experience underscores the vital role of the EPP, especially for those working hard to advance in life.

Mainers should not have to make choices like these. Programs like the EPP are why I and 1,600 other Maine families can keep our homes. This program transforms uncertainty into hope, and I cannot overstate its significance. Life unfolds daily, and Mainers face struggles, even when we strive to do the right things. These are Mainers who, despite our resilience, confront enormous challenges and should not have to choose between starting a career, maintaining rental assistance, or "living off the state."

Last year alone, the EPP assisted 1,400 to 1,500 families by covering overdue rent and providing rental assistance for up to a year. Families who might have otherwise been on the brink of homelessness could stay in their homes, within their communities, and out of crisis. This isn't just an investment in individual families—it's an investment in the heart of

our state. The Eviction Prevention Program (EPP) must continue. The Eviction Prevention Program (EPP) is a beacon of hope for families like mine, offering a safety net when we're teetering on the edge. I remember the relief I felt when I first learned about the EPP. Programs like these are not merely about housing but dignity, stability, and the right to a secure home.

Supporting initiatives such as LD 1522 is not just a financial consideration but a moral imperative. LD 1522 signifies our dedication to effective, evidence-driven solutions that ensure Maine remains home for every family.

Let's ensure that Maine remains a place where every family has the opportunity to thrive. Can I count on your vote to help make Maine "The Way Life Should Be"? Thank you for your time and consideration!

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