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Testimony of Representative Ambureen Rana introducing

LD 1036, An Act to Protect Recipients of Public Assistance from Housing Discrimination

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

Good afternoon, Senator Curry, Representative Gere and esteemed members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee. My name is Ambureen Rana, and I represent House District 21 in Bangor. I'm grateful for the opportunity to introduce **LD 1036, An Act to Protect Recipients of Public Assistance from Housing Discrimination**.

This bill makes it unlawful to discriminate, in housing or public accommodation, against someone because they access public assistance. Further, the bill defines "status as a recipient of federal, state or local public assistance" as someone who receives public assistance as a source of income, including medical assistance and housing subsidies.

Essentially, this bill would ensure that our community members who use housing vouchers will be able to do so, free from discrimination that often prevents them from securing safe and reliable housing, which is very limited in number.

Federal and state law prohibits housing discrimination based on various protected characteristics, including "race, color, ancestry, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, religion and familial status." Additionally, discrimination based on a person's status as a public assistance recipient or their history of seeking a Protection from Abuse Order is also prohibited, however, this issue still occurs.

According to a 2024 MaineHousing report, disability is the most common basis for an allegation of a fair housing violation. In 2023, 58 allegations (39.7% of the total) were based on disability, and it has consistently remained the most frequently reported allegation in past years. Most allegations regarding race or color originate in population centers, while allegations regarding sex, gender identity or sexual orientation are more likely to originate in smaller towns.¹

¹ https://www.mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/policy-research/federal-funds/2025-analysis-of-impediments-to-fair-housing---draft.pdf?sfvrsn=c9d15_5

Without housing vouchers, our housing crisis would be worse than it is. Currently, Maine's Section 8 waitlist has over 22,500 people on it.² The waitlist for subsidized housing in Maine can range from 14 to 28 months, and in some cases, people wait several years. All the while, we are struggling to find solutions to fill our shortage of 20,000 affordable housing units.

People desperately need to be housed in our communities, and discrimination should not be an added hindrance, on top of price, location, safety and availability.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions you have.

² <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2024/01/29/state/mainers-are-waiting-years-for-federal-housing-aid-joam40zk0w/>