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## Maine Equal Justice

### People Policy Solutions

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### Testimony on behalf of Maine Equal Justice in *Support of LD 1927, An Act to Protect Housing Quality by Enacting Mold Inspection, Notification and Remediation Requirements* May 12, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. I'm Andrea Steward, (she/her/hers) a policy advocate at Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit civil legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in strong support of LD 1927.

#### **What this Bill Does**

The bill creates clear timelines and duties for landlords and tenants around leaks, mold, and dampness—with enforceable rights and penalties. It empowers tenants and municipalities to hold landlords accountable and requires certified professionals for larger mold problems.

#### **Why Maine Equal Justice Supports this bill**

For too long, renters in Maine — particularly those in low-income and marginalized communities — have been forced to live in substandard housing plagued by leaks, chronic dampness, and mold. These unsafe conditions disproportionately harm families who already face barriers to safe, affordable housing and lack the financial resources or legal tools to demand repairs.

Mold exposure is not just an inconvenience. It is a serious health threat linked to asthma, respiratory illnesses, and other chronic health conditions — especially for children, seniors, and medically vulnerable individuals. Our organization has worked with countless tenants who have seen their health decline simply because landlords did not act quickly to fix leaks or remediate mold.<sup>1</sup>

The legal reality is stark: under Maine's current Warranty of Habitability, tenants' only recourse is to sue their landlord. To date, **not a single case in Maine courts has resulted in a successful**

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Mold and Health Effects" and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Mold and Dampness."

**ruling for tenants on mold issues.**<sup>2</sup> This is neither an effective nor an equitable solution — and it is certainly not the best use of our already overburdened court system. **LD 1927 offers a clear, structured, and practical alternative** to resolve these issues **outside the courts**.

This bill draws directly from **Maine's successful bed bug law**, which sets out clear expectations and timelines for landlords and tenants to follow.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, LD 1927:

- Establishes **reasonable, enforceable timelines** for landlords to inspect and remediate leaks and mold.
- Ensures tenants have a **right to safe, habitable housing** and full disclosure about the condition of their homes.
- Requires **qualified, certified professionals** to handle larger mold problems, protecting both tenant health and landlord investment.
- Empowers tenants, landlords, and municipalities alike with **fair and practical enforcement tools** to ensure accountability.
- Clearly establishes in state law the need to address mold and dampness problems **when they occur**, which Maine's current Warranty of Habitability does not explicitly do.

As tenant advocates, we know that tenants are often reluctant to speak up about unsafe conditions for fear of retaliation or eviction. That is why LD 1927's **anti-retaliation protections** are so vital — they ensure that tenants can assert their rights without risking their housing stability.

Furthermore, Maine's tight housing market also has a **housing quality problem**. Every week, complaints about mold and dampness pour into municipal offices, state agencies, nonprofits, and legislative offices.<sup>4</sup> This bill supports **both tenant health and landlord investment** — by protecting buildings from moisture damage and reducing the risk of costly structural repairs down the line.

This legislation reflects **nearly a decade of collaborative work** by landlords, tenants, legal advocates, health professionals, municipal officials, and environmental experts.<sup>5</sup> It draws on **best practices** established by the Maine Indoor Air Quality Council and lessons learned from other states like Massachusetts, California, and Ontario.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Maine Indoor Air Quality Council, *Legal Research Report on Mold and Housing* (2025)

<sup>3</sup> 14 M.R.S.A. §6021-A (Maine Bedbug Law)

<sup>4</sup> Testimony and complaint records from municipal code enforcement officers, Maine CDC, and nonprofit housing organizations (2015–2025)

<sup>5</sup> Maine Indoor Air Quality Council, *Mold Toolkit* and interdisciplinary workgroup proceedings (2015–2025)

<sup>6</sup> Legal and policy analysis of mold-related housing statutes in Massachusetts, California, Ontario, and other jurisdictions (2023)

I urge the Committee to vote **Ought to Pass** on LD 1927. This legislation is a crucial step toward ensuring all Mainers — regardless of income or zip code — can live in safe, healthy, and dignified housing.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.