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Maine Equal Justice

People Policy Solutions

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**Testimony on behalf of Maine Equal Justice on certain proposals within the Housing Authority sections of LD 2212 “An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027”**

**February 19, 2026**

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Senator Curry, Representative Gattine, Representative Gere, members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee. My name is Kathy Kilrain del Rio, I use she/her pronouns, and I’m the Advocacy and Programs Director for Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. I am testifying Neither For Nor Against this section of the supplemental budget.

Maine Equal Justice is testifying in support of the allocations to invest in the Affordable Home Ownership program, Rural Affordable Rental Housing Program, and the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program. We also support the investment for emergency shelters across the state. However, we urge you to consider the need for ongoing funding for this vital part of our housing infrastructure, which has been burdened more and more as the affordability crisis worsens.

Investments in the homeownership program and the construction of more affordable housing units, places where the Governor and Legislature have made significant investments, are important long term solutions in addressing our ongoing affordability crisis. However, we must also prioritize immediate solutions that keep people safely housed while they wait for the fruits of those long term investments.

**Affordability Now as we Build our Future**

The reality is it will be years before the housing investments in construction are felt widely<sup>1</sup> but many Mainers across the state need help to stay housed now. Maine needs to match building efforts with relief for renters who have seen rent increase by 32% from 2019-2025, nearly

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<sup>1</sup> Maine Center for Economic Policy, Rent relief is needed for Maine to endure its housing crisis (March 2024), <https://www.mecep.org/blog/rent-relief-is-needed-for-maine-to-endure-its-housing-crisis/>

double the national average.<sup>2</sup> This divergence is putting extraordinary pressure on low and moderate-income households.

At the same time, many low-income households are facing uncertainty and cuts to federal food, health care, and housing support which is likely to lead to a rise in eviction rates in Maine again. Without immediate affordability measures, too many households will lose their homes before new and affordable units come online.

Affordability is a long term, statewide problem, and a top issue for Mainers. Housing affordability has impacted Maine's businesses' ability to hire and retain staff. According to a Maine Center for Economic Policy analysis, nearly one in three Maine workers who rent a home or apartment pays more than one-third of their income toward housing.<sup>3</sup> A whopping 65% of Maine households making \$35k or less per year are paying more than 50% of their income on rent.<sup>4</sup>

Funding Maine's Eviction Prevention Program would be one of the most targeted housing affordability policies the legislature could undertake. The program has shown to reduce evictions alleviating the personal trauma and upheaval as well as the public costs of eviction and housing unaffordability that communities are already facing. EPP not only benefits people and families who stay in their homes, it also benefits landlords, who receive payment and avoid the financial and administrative costs of eviction and tenant turnover.

The current budget proposal before you provides funding for multiple new pilot programs at MaineHousing, yet it fails to continue funding for this committee's own successful, effective, and targeted pilot program started two years ago. EPP is already tested, data-driven, and targeted to those at greatest risk.

According to the preliminary evaluation done by the National Low Income Housing Coalition seven of eight EPP participants reported keeping stable housing while in the program. The program was utilized statewide as applications were submitted and approved from every county in Maine. According to the data, if you received help with rent from the Eviction Prevention Program, on average you were making \$17k and were a parent or guardian with at least one kid at home. While the program helped households in every county, per capita, the highest usage was in Androscoggin, Penobscot, and Aroostook County.

You have a bill to address this funding need on the Special Appropriations Table, LD 1522 sponsored by Rep. Rana. While the HED committee amended the original bill to \$10M for each of the 2 years due to financial constraints last year, we now have additional data from the pilot program paired with more recent eviction data and would recommend a higher funding level. In

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<sup>2</sup> As cited in the preliminary evaluation; *Apartment List. Historic rent estimates, Jan 2017 - present, United States and Maine. [Data set]. Accessed on November 24, 2025 from <https://www.apartmentlist.com/research/category/data-rent-estimates>*

<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> NLIHC, *Needs by State*. <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/maine>

order to successfully prevent all evictions for non-payment of rent, the program would need approximately \$19M/year.

We would be happy to work with your committees before your work sessions to assist in including language to meet this urgent need in the supplemental budget.

### **Investing in Emergency Shelters**

While the one-year funding allocated by this committee last year made a difference it was a temporary patch to a longstanding and ongoing challenge shelters have faced with an unsustainable gap in funding. The current allocation in this Supplemental Budget while beneficial is again only temporary leaving shelters teetering on the edge of shuttering permanently. In May 2025 the sole shelter in York County, the York County Adult Shelter, closed. Oxford County is on the brink of closing the Rumford Area group homes, a place providing safety and shelter to families. When shelters close statewide, bed capacity drops, unsheltered homelessness rises, human suffering increases, and public costs shift to municipalities, hospitals, schools, and emergency systems.

LD 2124, provides a sustainable and ongoing funding mechanism by tapping into the recent "mansion tax" enacted by this Legislature. This proposal should be strongly considered by this committee to protect and stabilize Maine's shelter system.

### **Conclusion**

Maine's housing strategy must include both long-term supply investments and immediate affordability protections. Funding new construction is vital, but so is preserving housing stability today through eviction prevention and sustained shelter funding.

Building for the future and preserving housing stability are not competing goals - they are complementary necessities.

Thank you for your consideration. We will be available for the work sessions and are happy to answer any questions.