

Public Testimony LD 2212

February 19, 2026

Kelli Austin of Waterville

To the Members of the Committee,

My name is Kelli Austin, and I am submitting this testimony in strong support LD 1522, which passed last year, and would allocate money to the Eviction Prevention Program (EPP). I live in Waterville with my three children and work at the Androscoggin jail as a mental health professional. I wish I could be there in person today, but I am attending a Mental Health First Aid training course. Even so, I felt it was essential to share how essential this program is and share how rent relief helped me.

I have personally relied on rent relief during one of the most challenging periods of my life. At the time, I was working hard to rebuild stability, continue my education, and stay committed to my recovery. Without rent relief, I would have lost my home. The stress of facing eviction would have jeopardized everything — my schooling, my recovery, and my ability to provide a safe and stable environment for my children.

Because of this assistance, I was able to keep our home. I stayed in school and maintained a 4.0 GPA. I stayed on track in my recovery and avoided the kind of overwhelming stress that could have led to relapse. That stability didn't just help me survive — it allowed me to move forward.

Today, for the first time in my life, I have begun a career I am truly proud of. I am now working as a mental health worker at SCJ, earning a wage that supports my family and doing work that is meaningful to me. I am able to help people who are facing the same untreated mental health and substance use challenges that I once struggled with. None of this would have been possible without the foundation of stability that the rent relief program provided.

And that is just what EPP does. It allows people the grace and support to get ahead and stay on track. I want to emphasize something important: because of help similar to EPP, for the first time in my life, I am at a point where I no longer need to rely on programs like this, or TANF, or SNAP. That is what real stability creates. Recovery is possible. People can and do change when they have the right support at the right time. I am living proof of that. Now I am here to make sure others have access to rent relief. EPP is an innovative and successful program that has prevented evictions all across Maine. We have the ability to lead the way, while the federal government cuts programs, we can invest in families and ensure they stay in their homes.

This is why I am urging you not only to continue the Eviction Prevention Program, but to fund it this year, and fund it sufficiently. Housing instability is not a temporary issue, and the solutions

cannot be temporary either. A pilot program is not enough. Families need consistent, reliable support — not something that might disappear just as they begin to rebuild their lives.

This program doesn't create dependency — it creates independence. I am living proof of what is possible when stability comes first. People across Maine need this help as rents are not getting cheaper and it's getting harder and harder to get by. Please fund EPP, and continue to invest in low income and working families who are struggling to get by. I made it out, and I know others can too, with just a little help.

Sincerely, Kelli Austin

Waterville, Maine

Number of Approved Eviction Prevention Program (EPP) applications per 10,000 people

