



creating pathways to stable housing, better health, and financial security

Good afternoon, esteemed members of the Appropriations and Housing Committees:

My name is Victoria Morales and I am the Executive Director of Project Home (formerly Quality Housing Coalition) where we have developed a successful model for housing stability for low-income renters over the last eight (8) years. With an investment of just \$2,000 per household, we have ensured stable housing for over 2,402 households, 5,500 adults and children statewide, all who have experienced homelessness or extreme housing insecurity, 80% of whom do not have access to a housing voucher – and who, with targeted interventions, increase their incomes in two years so that they can afford their housing costs without assistance.

I submit this testimony in support of replenishing the State's successful Eviction Prevention Program, LD 1522, which we administer at Project Home, and the long-term plan of increasing the State's housing supply.

Nearly 20 years ago, in a parenting class, I learned a simple truth: *what you focus on, you get more of*. If you focus on the dishes left in the sink, you get more dishes. If you focus on crisis, you get more crisis.

I believe Maine can move from a crisis-response model to one focused on crisis prevention, investing in proven strategies that promote stability without dependence. This approach will not only give families the foundation to invest in themselves and their communities but also strengthen Maine's economy, since people are the true drivers of economic growth.

The crises I refer to are the costly emergencies we all know too well: the opioid crisis, homelessness, over utilization of emergency rooms, and incarceration - all symptoms of poverty and all exacerbated by Maine's severe housing affordability crisis.

Before 2018, only 0.00643% of Maine's budget was allocated to creating housing. I asked that question back then to establish a baseline for improvement. As shocking as it was to hear, it explains the situation we face today: severe underproduction, rising market rate rents that far outpace incomes for many working families, and limited federal housing support.

The consequence of decades of underinvestment is what we face now – with fifty-one percent (51%) of Maine renters, roughly 70,000 households, in financial distress and at



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risk of eviction. That's not just a housing issue – it's a family stability issue, a workforce issue, a child welfare issue. When families lose housing, they lose jobs, health, and hope. The ripple effects fill jails, hospitals, shelters, and the foster care system.

We can't ignore the crisis and the need it created, but we can stop creating more of it.

LD 1522 – the Eviction Prevention Program – provides the foundational prevention funding Maine needs. As the administrator of the pilot, which builds on six years of Project Home's work, we've seen the results firsthand: the program has reduced evictions by 25% statewide. Each avoided eviction saves the State between \$20,000 - \$40,000 in combined public and private costs—from court fees and unit turnover to crisis services and the long-term harm experienced by families, schools, employers, and communities. For those with an eviction record, the path to safe, stable, and affordable housing can be nearly impossible, making prevention all the more critical.

In 2023, Maine experienced nearly 6,000 evictions, the highest in 15 years, which we estimate cost Maine, conservatively, \$180 million. In contrast, our pilot prevented 1,300 evictions for \$18 million, saving the state approximately \$39 million in avoided costs. We believe we can cut eviction filings statewide by 50% over the next two years.

My recommendation for this portion of the budget is simple: focus on meeting essential needs of struggling working families today by stabilizing households through eviction prevention. Fund the construction of 10,000 new homes (homeownership and rentals) over the next decade. Fund the existing shelter system – and plan for transitioning it toward housing-first models.

Thank you for your dedication to the housing needs of Maine people.

Victoria Morales
Executive Director, Project Home