

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Nyawal Lia and I live in Portland. I am here today in support of LD 2176, "An Act to Safeguard Personal Information and Strengthen Tenant Rights in Maine" I am the coordinator of Housing Justice Maine, a coalition that includes Maine People's Alliance, Maine Equal Justice, Community Organizing Alliance, Maine Youth Power, Raise-Op Housing Cooperative, and Homeless Voices for Justice, a program that stems out of Prebble Street.

What all of these organizations have in common is that we all believe that housing is a human right. This year many of our organizations have advocated for issues such as eviction prevention and shelter funding, because we know how crucial lack of funding for these programs means for our members.

I stand before you today to urge you to add our support for LD 2176, which will prevent landlords from sharing personal information about a tenant or any resident of a tenant's household without consent, with the intent to intimidate or cause someone to leave a rental property. The bill notes two exceptions: a judicial warrant or exigent circumstances. This bill protects tenants' rights, ensuring that landlords cannot intimidate them by threatening to disclose their personal information.

Most of us believe that everyone deserves a stable, safe, affordable place to call home. But from Fort Kent to Lubec to Kittery, Maine is in a housing crisis. We must ensure that Mainers are protected from discrimination and predatory experiences when it comes to their information being shared without consent, this seems to clearly be another example for Maine residents to not be granted the opportunity to feel safe in their homes.

A landlord's threat or intimidation to disclose a tenant's personal information could put the tenant in danger, cause extreme emotional harm, and make the tenant feel unsafe in their own home. This is especially true for survivors of human trafficking.

I hear horrible stories about some of our members from our perspective coalition partners that people have endured a lot of trauma to get the safe homes that they now rent. They are already living with stress, fear, and anxiety.

Presently, there is no statutory language that protects tenants from a landlord who wants to intimidate them by disclosing personal information about the survivor tenant without their consent. This bill addresses this significant policy gap in a world where privacy rights are valued, and disclosure of personal information could lead to dire consequences for a survivor.

LD 2176 is a statutory provision that protects tenants' personal information from disclosure without their consent, except in cases involving a judicial warrant or exigent circumstances. We respectfully urge the committee to support protecting tenants' privacy rights by passing LD 2176.

Thank you for your time.