

Testimony of Melissa Hackett
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In support of LD 1522, An Act to Establish the Maine Eviction Prevention Program

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and esteemed members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee. My name is Melissa Hackett. I am a policy associate with the Maine Children's Alliance, where I serve as the coordinator for the Maine Child Welfare Action Network, a group of organizations and individuals committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of all children, youth, and families in Maine. I offer testimony today in support of LD 1522.

Housing is essential for children and their families to experience safety and stability. When housing is unstable or unavailable for families, it can contribute to toxic stress, which can negatively affect child development and long-term health. This is an issue affecting too many families – last year, nearly five thousand Maine households were at risk of losing their homes because of eviction.

Lawmakers saw the urgent need for rent relief, especially for Mainers with the lowest incomes, and funded the Eviction Prevention Program (EPP) at \$18 million. The EPP pilot is now expected to keep 1,600 households safely housed.

Housing instability and homelessness also contribute to families being involved with the child welfare system. [In 2023, housing instability was cited 18% of the time as a reason for separating children from their families.](#) Being separated from parents and community creates harm and trauma for children. Recognizing this harm, we should do everything in our power to provide resources that alleviate safety concerns for children, like safe and stable housing.

When someone loses their home, it also means higher costs for MaineCare, shelters, the criminal justice system, and as noted above, the child welfare system. Based on other states' savings from rent relief efforts, Maine could save millions by continuing the EPP and avoiding more evictions. The price tag of the trauma it would also prevent for children and families is harder to quantify, but equally important to consider.

Maine may need a decade or more to build enough homes to meet needs, but the EPP quickly offered Maine people emergency rent relief within just months. Income for many families in Maine has not kept pace with the cost of safe and stable housing. Providing this support and preventing evictions is a necessary and less costly provision than families experiencing the crisis of not having housing.

Passing LD 1522 would build a better approach to housing stability for Maine people and communities. That's better and less costly for taxpayers. It's also best for the health and well-being of children and families across our state.