

Lenora Jackson  
Quality Housing Coalition  
LD 1522

Hello, My name is Lenora Jackson. I am here today in support of LD 1522 to establish the Maine Eviction Prevention Program.

I am a social worker who has worked for the past 20 years with Mainers experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. Currently I am a Program Specialist on the Eviction Prevention Program team. In the past 6 months since the inception of this program, I have spoken on the phone with hundreds of people facing eviction. Their stories tell of struggles to make ends meet in an unforgiving economy, with medical emergencies, domestic violence situations, unexpected vehicle expenses, and a housing market across the state with sky-high rents out of the reach of average working people.

I wanted to share some of their stories with you.

Sandra

Sandra is a 62-year-old lifelong resident of Knox County who is raising her 3 grandchildren, ages 14, 7, and 3, as a single parent. Her 3-year-old grandson was born prematurely and opiate-addicted, and continues to receive Child Development Services for multiple developmental disabilities. Her young adult son, the father of her grandson, is in jail for drug charges.

Sandra is also battling Stage 3 ovarian cancer and actively undergoing treatment. She drives herself to Portland for treatment several times a month. She receives Social Security disability payments, but the limited income is not enough to cover the cost of her fair market rent apartment in a high-priced coastal town. She always paid what she could to her landlord, but with the increase in cost of food, gas, and heating fuel, she fell behind on rent payments in the last 6 months.

Facing eviction, Sandra applied for rental assistance through the Eviction Prevention Program, with the help of her case manager. Her application was approved, and EPP paid off all her past due rent to her landlord, and will pay a portion of her rent for the next 6 months. Sandra has been saved from being put out on the street with nowhere to go due to the support of this program. Sandra can now focus on her medical needs and the medical and developmental needs of her 3 grandchildren.

James

James is a 45-year-old lifelong resident of Maine. He moved from The County to Waldo County to work in the construction business when he was in his 20's. Over time, he developed chronic back and shoulder pain from long days of physical labor, and when he was 40, a workplace accident cost him the use of one of his hands. No longer able to make a living at his profession of construction, he applied for Social Security disability benefits, but was repeatedly denied. With no income, he lost his modest rental housing and then, having no family or social network to lean on, James went to live in a tent set up in the woods behind a local store. He lived in that tent year-round through 2 Maine winters. His case manager and other community members assisted him by bringing him food and changing out his propane tanks, and giving him access to the YMCA so he could take a shower. He lived his life in acute pain much of the time, and was often cold, hungry, and alone.

His case manager worked tirelessly to find James housing, but it was hard to find a landlord who would approve him since James had an inconsistent rental history. Finally successful in securing housing, James moved into the rental trailer a year ago. His appeal to Social Security Disability was again denied, and with no income, James spent his days crawling under shrubs and bushes to collect returnable cans and bottles to redeem for income. He balanced 2 or 3 large plastic garbage bags of cans on the handlebars of his bicycle on the way to the redemption center. It wasn't enough income to pay his rent, and soon he fell behind. He once again faced eviction and the

prospect of returning to living in a tent. His case manager told him about the Eviction Prevention Program and helped him apply. His application was approved and his past due rent paid off. James got to spend the winter indoors, in the comfort of his heated home rather than outdoors in the elements during one of the coldest winters in years.

Please make no mistake: This program saves lives.

These are real stories of people who lost their housing:

Grace lives year-round with her partner and their son in an unheated camper with no sanitation. She holds a full-time paraprofessional job with good pay and benefits at a local employer. She cannot afford local rents.

Samantha lives in a dilapidated shed in the woods. In the winter she lets the free-roaming chickens come indoors.

George lives in his truck with his emotional support dog. His number one request is for dog food.

Anne and Theresa have lived in 3 different hotel rooms over the last 6 months. They are about to lose all their belongings stored in a storage unit due to inability to keep up on monthly payments.

Larry and Valerie live in a hotel room with their 4 cats. Their car keeps breaking down. Their toilet has not flushed properly in months.

These are our neighbors. These are Mainers. Let's take care of them.

Thank you.