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Testimony Presenting LD 819
An Act To Reduce Lung Cancer Rates in Maine by Requiring Testing for and Mitigation of Radon in Residential Buildings by Landlords

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Thursday, April 8, 2021

Good morning, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing. I am Senator Joe Baldacci and I represent Senate District 9, which is made up of Bangor and Hermon. I am here today to present LD 819, “An Act To Reduce Lung Cancer Rates in Maine by Requiring Testing for and Mitigation of Radon in Residential Buildings by Landlords.”

As many of you may already know, lung cancer is by far the leading cause of cancer deaths among both women and men. Lung cancer deaths account for a quarter of all cancer deaths in the United States. In other words, more people die each year of lung cancer than colon, breast, and prostate cancers combined.¹ In the state of Maine, we rank 12th in highest overall death rates of cancer deaths among all 50 states, and 6th in new lung cancer cases.² I think we can all agree that these numbers are alarming. That is why I am introducing this bill, to help reduce lung cancer rates in Maine by requiring annual testing and mitigation of radon in residential buildings across the state.

This issue first came to my attention when Deb Violette, President of Free ME from Lung Cancer, reached out to me about this complex issue. I know you will hear from Deb and her personal story later on in this hearing about how radon has deeply affected her life. For those that don’t know, radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas which may be found in high concentrations in indoor environments, such as homes and workplaces.³ More pertinent to this bill, radon is one of the leading causes of lung cancer. More than 1,400 Mainers are diagnosed

¹ <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/lung-cancer/about/key-statistics.html#:~:text=Lung%20cancer%20is%20by%20far,breast%2C%20and%20prostate%20cancers%20combined.>

² <https://mainelungcancercoalition.org/#:~:text=Maine%20Ranks%20of%20All%20US%20States&text=More%20than%201%2C430%20people%20in,and%20early%20detection%2C%20saves%20lives.>

³ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/radon-and-health>

with lung cancer each year and 75% of lung cancer cases in Maine are detected late and are often not treatable.⁴

These numbers coupled with Maine's housing crisis paints a grim picture. In Maine, we have a 4.95% rental vacancy rate. This number represents the percentage of homes for rent that are not occupied.⁵ Compared to the national average of 5.97%, it is extremely difficult to find a home across the country, but especially here. This is directly related to the radon issue in this case because landlords are not currently incentivized to do the radon testing or begin the mitigation process because they know that there are people in line to fill the apartment even if someone leaves. More importantly, if tenants find that their apartment has radon in it, they are allowed to break their lease and leave, but there is often nowhere to go. This is a problem, and this bill takes direct aim at solving this problem.

This bill requires landlords, beginning in 2022, to test residential buildings yearly for radon. If the test reveals a level of radon of 4.0 picocuries per liter of air or above, the landlord must mitigate within 6 months the level of radon in the residential building until it is reduced to a level below 4.0 picocuries per liter of air. I understand that this is a bold requirement, but based on the numbers I shared, this is a necessary requirement to protect the people of Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I would happily answer any questions you may have.

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⁵ <https://www.deptofnumbers.com/rent/maine/>