



Maine People's Alliance

Senator Pierce, Rep. Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing. My name is Cate Blackford and I am the Public Policy Director of the Maine People's Alliance. MPA is Maine's largest community action organization, with 32,000 members stretching from Kittery to Fort Kent. We are committed to creating a state where everyone has what they need, contributes what they can, and no one is left behind.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today neither for nor against LD 1540.

You have heard testimony from many others today about how deeply unaffordable rent is in Maine and how far it has outstripped wages.

I remember being taught by my step-dad growing up, "Make sure one week's paycheck covers your housing costs!" That old adage isn't even the goal anymore. Instead we urge people to find a home that takes no more than 30% of their gross income.

Far too many Maine renters would feel lucky to pay even that. According to Maine Housing, 41.5% of Maine renters are cost-burdened, paying more than 30% of their income on housing. Approximately 24 *thousand* renter households are paying more than half their income on rent. These are people who are working, older Mainers, and people with disabilities.

We applaud the goal of LD 1540 in attempting to ease that burden with a meaningful reduction in renter's monthly obligations. However, there is no provision in the bill to protect renters who are receiving this relief. These tenants could easily have their rent raised by \$100. \$200. \$300. Or more. I am sure that the majority of landlords would not profiteer off a program designed to make their tenants' lives easier. But having seen the recent massive rent hikes that often come with new owners, it is essential the legislature protect this investment for its intended purpose - 24 months of a bit of breathing room for renters.

Or better yet, support the comprehensive rental assistance and reforms in LD 1710.

Thank you for your time and the thoughtful work you are doing.