



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

Kristen Cloutier

Assistant Majority Leader

33 Charles St.

Lewiston, ME 04240

Phone: (207) 807-1637

Kristen.Cloutier@legislature.maine.gov

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Testimony of Rep. Kristen Cloutier supporting
LD 1710, An Act to Establish the Maine Rental Assistance and Guarantee Program and Amend the Laws Regarding Tenants and the Municipal General Assistance Program
Before the Joint Select Committee on Housing

Good afternoon, Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and esteemed colleagues of the Joint Select Committee on Housing. My name is Kristen Cloutier and I represent House District 94, which includes a portion of my hometown of Lewiston. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony as a proud cosponsor of **LD 1710, An Act to Establish the Maine Rental Assistance and Guarantee Program and Amend the Laws Regarding Tenants and the Municipal General Assistance Program**.

This bill, as amended, takes a multifactorial approach to address the many challenges Mainers face in navigating our housing system, both in obtaining and maintaining housing.

One of the reasons why so many Mainers were able to stay in their homes after losing their income during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic was because of the federal Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) Program of which \$292,492,480 was provided to Maine, helping 34,207 households across the state. When the funding for this program came to an end, there was great worry, and rightfully so, at how families would manage to hold on to their homes without the financial assistance they once relied upon.

The Maine State Housing Authority stopped accepting applications for ERA as of September 30, 2022. Maine courts reported that housing eviction filings in 2022 spiked 27% as compared to the year before (from 3,908 in 2021 to 4,965 in 2022), and landlords, tenants and attorneys have confirmed that the end of ERA has contributed to this increase.¹

LD 1710 would require the Maine State Housing Authority to establish and administer the Maine Rental Assistance and Guarantee Program, which will include a state-based rental assistance component that would receive \$75.5 million in ongoing funds annually.

¹ Evictions in Maine shot up during 2022, with filings growing 27%.

<https://www.pressherald.com/2023/01/19/evictions-in-maine-shot-up-during-2022-with-filings-growing-27/>

Further, the bill amends the Maine Human Rights Act to prohibit discrimination against a tenant because the tenant participates in a federal, state or local tenant-based rental assistance program and requires owners of more than 10 residential rental units to ensure that at least 10% of the rental units meet the definition of “affordable housing.”

If we are going to make inroads in our housing crisis, we must tackle this issue from multiple angles, including providing assistance to those who are currently unable to remain housed, overcoming the stigma associated with receiving financial assistance to help families stay in their homes and a requirement that more affordable housing be provided to help house our community. Housing is the foundation of security and stability in one’s life. We must find a way to provide more safe and affordable housing and LD 1710 does just that.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this crucial legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Kristen S. Cloutier".

Rep. Kristen S. Cloutier
Assistant House Majority Leader