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55 Portland Street

Portland, ME 04101

207.775.0026

[info@preblestreet.org](mailto:info@preblestreet.org)United Way  
of Southern Maine

Hello Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Special Committee on Housing,

My name is Taylor Cray, and I am the Outreach Team Leader for Preble Street's Advocacy Team. I am here today to testify in support 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.

Throughout the day, you will hear testimony from a variety of individuals, each with their own experiences and stories regarding the necessity of this bill, and for good reason. The HOME Act provides the people of the State of Maine with housing stability at a time when the cost of living is becoming steadily more unaffordable. Crushing poverty, looming threats of eviction, and inconsistent food access exacerbate existing distress for Maine families and individuals, forcing them to make impossible decisions to support their households.

At Preble Street, we work tirelessly alongside dedicated community partners and allies to help keep folks safe and healthy. Housing, shelter, and food security are essential for Mainers to lead healthy lives and escape the cycles of poverty that keep many families trapped for generations. While no singular policy can address all these issues, the HOME Act is a bold and powerful proposal built on the knowledge and experience of Mainers. The HOME Act addresses some of the most prominent fears that permeate the minds of Maine renters. As I am sure you know, many of our most persistent housing issues are the result of past policies that have favored the interests of businesses, corporate landlords, and others who are able to pour money into influencing policymaking. These policies have impacted Mainers living in poverty, New Mainers, and Mainers of color at disproportionate rates, furthering existing stigmas and socioeconomic divides.

The City of Portland is currently engaging in a difficult discussion surrounding an encampment of unhoused individuals living on the Bayside Trail. This past Tuesday, the City of Portland decided to move the encampment despite desperate pleas from advocates, community partners, and impacted individuals. These individuals truly have nowhere else to go. There is no available shelter or housing, and the City's encampment policy continues to limit the areas where individuals are permitted to camp. South Portland hotels, which have been sheltering unhoused individuals for many months, have now closed, leaving these folks with no options. Case workers and individuals work hard to secure housing vouchers, only to have applications rejected time and time again. Housing costs are rising, evictions are ongoing, and the cost of living continues to creep upward. The HOME Act can help prevent individuals from reaching similar points of crisis.



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We have the power to make changes to the laws and policies that have allowed the housing and shelter crisis to become so desperate. Prohibiting discrimination against individuals with housing vouchers will help families and individuals find safe and stable housing in neighborhoods of their choosing. Changes to the Real Estate Tax Credit will help to fund a deeply necessary rental assistance program, keeping Mainers in their homes at a time when losing housing can mean remaining without housing and shelter for extended periods of time. Consumer protections for renters will prevent individuals in poverty from being further penalized by lower credit scores and higher eviction records. Each of these policy changes will help to ease the desperation, chronic poverty, and deep psychological distress that is felt by thousands of Mainers each day. The widespread dedication and support today is proof of the deep-seated need for these policy changes. Please pass the HOME Act and support Mainers as we support one another.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Taylor Cray  
Advocacy Outreach Team Leader  
Preble Street



United Way  
of Southern Maine



