

Genevieve Flores
Kittery
LD 1710

Testimony in support of LD 1710
Genevieve Flores
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Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and members of the Housing committee,

My name is Genevieve Flores and I live in Kittery. I am here to testify in support of LD 1710, the HOME act.

Let me tell you what housing instability means to me:

I am a single mother of 4. Securing housing for me and my kids has been a struggle and it has impacted our entire family. In 2018, I was one of those people that had their rent raised, and I couldn't afford the new cost. We were homeless for 24 months. First, I had to prove I was homeless by living in my car or staying in a shelter. I ended up staying on my friend's outdoor patio with my family. That way we could use their bathroom but still be qualified as homeless. It's hard to believe the hoops we have to jump through when we are in a state of emergency.

Being low income and with an unaffordable rent caused us to be homeless in 2018. I didn't have disability insurance at that time, it hadn't kicked in, and I wasn't working, I couldn't pay rent at all until I got the voucher. We spent 5 months in the shelter. It was 6 months before we got into transitional housing. I spent 19 months in transitional housing. I eventually received Section 8 while I was in transitional housing. So from the time I became homeless to the time the voucher came was nearly a year. Once I had Section 8, it took another full year to find someone to take the voucher. There is real discrimination that goes along with being a single parent, low income and having a voucher, IT TOOK TOO LONG.

During that time here's what happened:

→ I went to Dover, NH to a women and children's shelter to avoid being in unsafe shelter conditions with my kids. Leaving the state meant I lost EBT and healthcare even though I maintained my Maine residency.

→ I relied on food pantries, borrowing money, I skipped a lot of meals, and made sure my kids ate at school. Anywhere, I could cut on food costs, I would.

Because we could only find shelter that was far from my kids school, on the days when my car wasn't starting or I couldn't drive, they missed school. Like when my registration had lapsed and I couldn't afford to get it inspected. I needed new tires and didn't have the money. There wasn't a quiet environment at the shelter for the kids to do their homework. And even though I tried to shield them from the hardships of living in a shelter, that's impossible to do. Their grades were affected. They were definitely mentally and emotionally impacted. I also had a legal burden at that time trying to keep my family together. Because we were homeless, it was difficult to maintain custody of my kids.

Living in a shelter with others in crisis is rough. It's hard for a bunch of people that are traumatized to lift each other out of a hole together. Being in the shelter is like this:

If my child had a sports event and we didn't make it in time for dinner at the shelter, we couldn't eat. The kitchen was only accessible at certain hours of the day so there were times I broke the rules. Living in a shelter is a nightmare. What I'm trying to say is that emergency shelter is so important but it's not a long term solution. The HOME Act is a long term solution to our housing crisis.

I am a person of integrity and I am honest. I would share what my source of income was to pay the rent, and would get no responses from landlords. At first they'd be interested until they learned I paid rent with a voucher. There is only one low income housing development in my community that takes Section 8. There's a 2-3 year waitlist there. And so I started looking in Portland, looking all over in the private

market. If someone got back to me, the second they found out I have Section 8 or are low income or have a disability, I was instantly disqualified by their standards. I tried to sell myself as a tenant - I came up with a script, to put a positive spin on what having section 8 could offer. I lied with that. This is why you would want to accept a tenant that has Section 8 - rent guaranteed every month, doesn't depend on my job. Win-win for the landlord. And still it took over a year to find a landlord to accept my voucher.

The only person willing to rent to me long term was a church-owned place that was willing to take Section 8. Without the help of local organizations, such as Fair Tide, which most people don't have, I would still be homeless or worse. Even though I was showing up with their support, I still faced a lot of closed doors because of discrimination. The rental assistance program in the HOME Act would help thousands get a voucher like Section 8 but without having to become homeless first, like I was with my kids.

My story has a happy ending - I am now renting a 4 bedroom home in Kittery close to services, groceries and school where I have been for a year and a half now. I finally have housing security. But there are still thousands like me going through what I did, and it doesn't have to be this way.

Please take action now and pass LD 1710, the HOME Act. People need help paying high rents and need protection from discrimination.