



## **Testimony of Kara Hay in Support of LD 1710**

### **Before the Select Committee on Housing**

#### **In support of LD 1710: An Act to Establish the Housing Opportunity for Maine (HOME) Act May 12, 2023**

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, I am Kara Hay, President and CEO of Penquis, a large community action agency in central/northern Maine that serves between 3,500 and 5,000 struggling Mainers every, single day. We provide roughly fifty services aimed at ensuring Mainers have access to safe and affordable housing, early childhood education, transportation, family supports and programs that build financial stability. I am submitting written testimony in support of LD 1710: An Act to Establish the Housing Opportunity for Maine (HOME) Act.

As I know you all understand, rent is simply not affordable for many Maine residents. We see this every day in Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Knox Counties as hard-working Mainers come to our organization seeking assistance to stay warm, housed, and supported. Even with working full time positions, many are simply unable to afford what is available to them for rental costs. We know that we need more housing units in our State. It is important to note that we also need help bridging the affordability gap to make rents more affordable. Rent relief would help fill this gap, which is especially important to making rents affordable for people with really low incomes. This will help cover the cost of rent while seeking jobs that pay a living wage or waiting for longer-term federal rental assistance.

We know that extremely low-income households are most vulnerable to housing instability. Nearly 72% of these households pay more than 30% of their monthly income towards rent, and 52% pay more than 50% of their monthly income towards rent; a threshold that HUD deems severely rent burdened. In addition, Maine had over 5,000 households who faced loss of their home due to eviction in the 3 years preceding the pandemic – most for nonpayment of rent which would be avoidable with access to rent relief. Maine's joint Section 8 waitlist, which covers most of the state, has over 25,000 households on it. These families wait years for needed assistance. Rent relief could help make rent affordable for people while they wait for a housing voucher.

Bridging the affordability gap for low-income renters will result in many positive outcomes including: preventing homelessness, supporting families and children, helping to maintain economic stability, stimulating the economy, addressing gaps in Maine's housing system, keeping Maine landlords in business, and shrinking systemic inequalities.

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With all of these reasons in mind, I ask the Committee to support LD 1710: An Act to Establish the Housing Opportunity for Maine (HOME) Act, which will help bridge the gap to rental affordability.

Thank you for your time and consideration.