



**Testimony of Jena Jones on Behalf of  
the Maine Council on Aging to the Joint Select  
Committee on Housing**

**In Favor 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**

Provided on May 12, 2023

Good morning, Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and the members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing.

My name is Jena Jones, and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 135 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings.

On behalf of the MCOA and all five of Maine's Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), I am testifying in favor of LD 1710.

Maine is facing a housing crisis, but for older adults the situation is particularly grim. Maine's AAAs are reporting an increase in calls for housing assistance and services, Legal Services for the Elderly (LSE) are reporting an uptick in calls requiring representation of older adults in eviction cases, sometimes directly because of the direct care workforce crisis. Maine's experience is not unique as older adults represent the fastest growing homeless population in the nation.<sup>1</sup>

Despite all of our liberties and freedoms, we have yet to establish the right to safe, affordable housing for all. In 2019, LSE reported their eviction defense totals at 161 cases, by 2022 that number reached 303. Southern Maine Agency on Aging received 189% more calls in 2022 for homelessness than they did in 2021. These challenges persist due to an overall lack of available, affordable housing and an egregious lack of protections to ensure that the most at-risk people remain safely housed.

What LD 1710, or The HOME Act, offers Maine residents are the kind of safeguards necessary to begin to ensure housing becomes a right afforded to all. Critically, the bill prohibits landlords from discriminating against tenants who receive rental assistance, establishes rental assistance for folks who are in need, and provides consumer protections for those who are unable to pay.

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<sup>1</sup> Homelessness Among Older Adults: An Emerging Crisis, Kushel, 2020 b

Older women in Maine are particularly likely to benefit from the protections offered by The HOME Act. Older women are two times more likely to live alone as older men, and at least half of the older women in Maine who live alone do not have enough money to meet their basic needs.<sup>2</sup> Because older women are more likely to experience housing insecurity and a higher rate of becoming unhoused, The HOME Act addresses an important gender and age equity issue.

Ensuring affordability in housing options in Maine is key to obtaining stability in the housing market, and ensuring tenant protections and assistance reduces the chance that older people will become unhoused. LD 1710 is a big step toward stable ground. Not only will these supports help to curb homelessness rates among older adults in Maine, but they will also assist Maine in developing equity in housing options by combating the stigma associated with housing assistance. This is a win for Maine's people and its economy. The MCOA urges this Committee to support The HOME Act.

Thank you, I am happy to answer any questions.

Jena Jones

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<sup>2</sup> <https://mainecouncilonaging.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Economic-Security-Older-Women-in-Maine-Report-FINAL.pdf>, Economic Security of Older Women in Maine, Snow & Gattine, 2021.