

## **TESTIMONY OF SCOTT KLINGER, in support of LD 1710, the HOME Act**

**May 12, 2023**

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Housing Committee,

My name is Scott Klinger and I am a resident of Gardiner, Maine. I write with enthusiastic support of LD 1710, the HOME Act.

For the last five months I have been helping with the Saturday morning breakfasts at the Unitarian Universalist Community Church and Sunday morning Suds Up Sunday, shower program at the Kennebec Valley YMCA, both in Augusta. These programs each serve about 40 of our unhoused neighbors, who spent the winter months staying at the Emergency Overnight Warming Shelter at South Parish Congregational Church in Augusta.

It has been a humbling honor to become friends with many of these beloved neighbors. Many citizens often tend to refer to people experiencing homelessness as if their experiences were monolithic and their situation the result of personal choices they've made.

But as I have listened week after week to their stories that they have unfurled at a measured pace, I have learned that there are many paths to living vulnerably on our streets. One common thread is accumulated failures by society and government to offer protection as they were growing up. Many of them were physically, sexually, and emotionally abused in their birth homes. Some had undiagnosed or untreated learning disabilities or mental illness. Several have been living on the streets since they were teenagers and a few since they were as young as 12.

LD 1710, the HOME Act, would respond to some of those past failures to provide care and protection. Because unhoused people are so vulnerable, they are often taken advantage of, especially by landlords.

Many of those I share weekend mornings with have been able to identify available apartments, but have been turned away because they have Section 8 voucher, or an uneven work history. Many work nearly-full-time and have still been turned away even with a voucher because of past evictions. This history follows them even after they've worked hard to change their lives. I have even heard horrific stories about those who have been evicted after refusing the sexual advances of their landlords.

The HOME Act would bring this uneven power relationship between tenants and landlords into better balance, by banning overt acts of discrimination against people simply because they are economically vulnerable. It would also strengthen the financial security of very low-income people by offering rental assistance, aid that would be paid for with modest increases to the real estate transfer tax, which would fall most heavily on the wealthiest and best housed among us.

I've lived in Maine only a few short years, but I see everyday how Mainers look after their neighbors. My experience with other volunteers making community with our unhoused neighbors has allowed me to witness heart-cracking acts of love and mutual care between the volunteers and those who lack adequate shelter. Mainers do care with open hearts. But there's a role for the state to play to extend more care to those living at the edge of our society. LD 1710, The HOME Act, won't solve all the complicated problems of experiencing homelessness, but it is a vital first step.

I urge the Housing Committee to advance this bill and enshrine the fairness and care that is an embedded value that most Mainers share, into housing law that better protects those who struggle to find housing.

Sincerely,

W Scott Klinger

Gardiner, ME