



Date May 11th, 2023

Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine testimony to the Committee on Housing 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.

To Chairperson Pierce, Chairperson Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing.

My name is Rebekah Lane and I am the Community Organizer for Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine. I am here today to express our support, and ask for your 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.

The mission of Good Shepherd Food Bank is to eliminate hunger in Maine by improving access to nutritious food for people in need, building strong community partnerships, and mobilizing the public in the fight to end hunger. Good Shepherd Food Bank works in partnership with nearly 600 organizations to help distribute food to community members in need. Our network of partner agencies includes food pantries, meal sites, senior centers, school programs, and healthcare facilities. In our work centering equity, we are increasingly working with communities of color to address food security in a culturally responsive way.

We believe there is a solution to the problem of hunger in Maine. Working in partnership with the state legislature we can and will help reduce the impact of hunger in our state and make Maine a stronger, better place to work and live.

Housing security and food security cannot be untangled from each other, having access to one stabilizes the other. I know this both through a content lens within the work being done by the food bank and through context lens as someone who has faced housing and food insecurity throughout my whole adult life.

When the systems in place are ineffective luck becomes the vehicle for needs being met, so I would like to start with a story of good luck. After spending a brief time homeless my family of four, including elementary aged children, we were able to find exceptional housing with an equally exceptional landlord. Only to find out a couple months later that the whole building was being sold. My husband and I spent many nights talking about leaving our Pride flag up during the showings or not, knowing that we could lose our housing depending on the new owners' reaction to the flag. We decided we would rather belong with pride than fit in by hiding. Showing after showing happened, our side filled with worry on who would be purchasing the building, knowing we had no way to control any aspect of the process. Turns out our pride flag did matter in the process, with our new landlords sharing that seeing that flag in pictures and during showings meant they knew they were safer in our community themselves. Those landlords have met us with kindness, acceptance, and a willingness to work through difficult situations together. Luck is why my family is currently housed, and bad luck in the form of discrimination could have lost us that same housing.

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As I have shared with this committee before, I have moved many times in the last 13 years and my rent during those times has ranged from 33% to 75% of my gross income. The majority of those 13 years we fell within HUD's definition of severely rent burdened – paying more than 50% of monthly income towards rent. I was granted a voucher and subsequently lost it because the amount I was approved for was hundreds of dollars below market rents within my county. We were recipients of the rental relief program that was available during the pandemic, with it being the reason we were able to go from homeless to housed thanks to help with the first, last, and security deposits.

The HOME Act will provide that safety from discrimination, the rental assistance when being priced out of an area due to unaffordable rental rates, and by bridging the gap in so many aspects of housing. This safety means less unhoused Mainers, more support for families, economic stability, and addresses the systemic inequalities of marginalized communities being more likely to face housing discrimination and instability.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

Rebekah Lane
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