

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

My name is Raychel Ward and I am from Livermore falls Maine. I regret that I could not testify in person. As you know today was Head Start Goes to Augusta. Just last year after Headstart Goes to Augusta I was rushing home to meet with a news reporter. I was meeting with this reporter due to the unaffordable sub par housing I was living in in Lewiston Maine at the time.

I do not envy any of you sitting on this committee today. Housing is a complex issue and can be a hard one to navigate as a tenant, landlord or legislature. So instead of asking you to do one thing or another I may ask you to do this, travel our fine state and take note of the crisis you see around you. Be aware of the unhoused population and question how did we get here? Just last year I was living in an apartment with mice, bugs and mold and could get no help despite paying almost my whole family's income in rent for a 3 bedroom inner city apartment. I had made calls to the property management company that took over after our building sold and continuously raised the rent despite making no repairs. I recall June 9th of 2022 we were leaving for a little league game and the inside of my fridge was warm. This was a saturday. I called after hours maintenance to be told and I quote "I don't have a refrigerator shoved up my ass" from the maintenance at Central Maine Property management. Despite paying \$1600 a month for rent and living off what little SNAP benefits we had we now had no way to store milk for my children, or food in general and had to buy meal by meal adding to our financial woes. This continued until November when we could finally afford to move out of the apartment and into the home we live in now.

In regards to LD1710 I think you need to think carefully about what this bill is asking for. We are asking that property owners no longer be able to discriminate against those receiving assistance. We are asking that they make housing available and accessible. We are asking that housing no longer be in disrepair. We are asking that you take into consideration the soaring costs of rent that will continue to go higher under the guise of "Market rate" when housing vouchers are not updated nearly as often as rental price increases. We are asking that you understand not all of us are out of the workforce and often cannot be available to reapply monthly for help we so desperately need. We are asking that debts not be sent to collections because of an inability to pay for the most basic of needs. I know this is a tall order and I know you feel that you're damned if you do and damned if you don't but please I urge you to vote ought to pass on LD1710.