



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

**In Favor of LD 2158 – An Act to Improve the  
Housing Voucher System**

Submitted on January 25, 2024

Greetings, Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and the members of the 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 140 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. I am testifying in favor of LD 2158.

As we address Maine’s continued and severe housing crisis it is imperative that we continue to do so via a multi-pronged strategy. In addition to funding construction of new affordable housing, repurposing and restoring existing structures into livable spaces, and implementing new and creative methods for encouraging increased development, we must also consider how we can protect Mainers in need to ensure continued access to safe, affordable housing.

These protections are needed now perhaps more than ever before. Our Area Agencies on Aging are reporting an increase in calls for housing assistance and services, Legal Services for the Elderly (LSE) are reporting an uptick in cases requiring representation of an older adult facing eviction and these anecdotes are borne out in data: older adults represent the fastest growing homeless population in the nation with numbers expected to triple by 2030.<sup>12</sup>

For the more than 22,500 people in Maine, including older adults, on a waitlist to receive vouchers, many of whom have been waiting years, the improvements offered in LD 2158 are long past due. As the Bangor Daily News reports, average time on a waitlist can be years and if eligible housing isn’t found within the timeframe of the voucher, the voucher expires. These challenges, after finally receiving a long-awaited voucher, leave many Mainers facing homelessness when affordable housing cannot be found.

The improvements to Maine’s housing voucher system, as proposed in LD 2158, will allow for greater efficacy and efficiency in meeting the housing needs of low-income Mainers across our state. The ability to issue vouchers at a higher than fair market rental rate incentivizes landlords

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<sup>1</sup> (Kushel, 2020)

<sup>2</sup> (Skiba, 2022)

to accept more low-income renters and the release of restrictors like time and geographic limits on vouchers will allow greater opportunity to find safe, affordable housing as quickly as possible.

We have a myriad of options in front of us to solve one of the most pressing challenges and each must serve Maine's people by providing safe, reliable, and affordable housing to all. LD 2158 is one such solution to help those in need.

I urge you to support LD 2158 and thank you for your consideration.

Jena Jones