

Dear chairpersons Carney and Moonen, and all members of the Judiciary committee:

My name is Josie Phillips, and I am representing Maine Center for Economic Policy. I am testifying in favor of LD 701, which would update the required notice prior to rent increases from 45 to 90 days. By providing more notice before a rent hike, this bill would help provide an easier transition to renters struggling to find affordable housing in Maine's ultra-competitive housing market.

I have already testified before this committee that stable housing is fundamental to human wellbeing.¹ When safe, affordable housing is scarce, Maine's families and state economy suffer. Unfortunately, due to decades of poor policy choices, housing — particularly housing affordable to people earning below the median income — is extremely difficult to find in Maine. We are facing a statewide shortage of between 20,000 to 25,000 affordable housing units,² and the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment is considered unaffordable for the median renter in every single Maine county.³ For every 100 renters earning 30 percent of the median income — approximately \$21,000 per year⁴ — there are only 51 units considered affordable.⁵ Mainers earning 30 percent or less of the median income represent 39,716 households, or one in every four renter households.

It's no surprise, then, that the news is full of stories of people struggling to find housing, often settling for cramped, antiquated, or otherwise poor quality housing at a rate they can barely afford. In the words of one woman cited in the Portland Press Herald this month, "It's all garbage."⁶

In short, finding housing in Maine is difficult. LD 701 would not solve the affordable housing crisis or give anyone a place to live, but it would guarantee a three month search period — a period that I personally needed — for everyone facing an imminent rent increase. It would give renters time to figure out how they'll afford the new rent or where they'll move to if they can't afford it. Because of the sorely needed time and flexibility this bill extends to renters, I urge this committee to vote yes on LD 701.

¹ <https://legislature.maine.gov/backend/app/services/getDocument.aspx?doctype=test&documentId=167143>

² Portland Press Herald, "Scenes from the affordable housing crisis."

<https://www.pressherald.com/2023/02/12/scenes-from-the-affordable-housing-crisis/>

³ Maine Housing, "Housing in Maine: An Overview." <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/8866>

⁴ St. Louis Federal Reserve Economic Data, Median Household Income in Maine, 2021.

<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MEHOINUSMEA646N>

⁵ National Low Income Housing Coalition, "Housing Needs by State – Maine." <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/maine>

⁶ Portland Press Herald, "Scenes from the affordable housing crisis."

Board of Directors

Lee Webb, Ph.D., Chair

Barbara Burt, Vice-chair

Pamela Cox, Treasurer

Ben Chin, Secretary

Sandra Butler

Maulian Dana

Marcus Hutchins

Jessica Maurer

Stacy Mitchell

Matt Schlobohm

Lucy Van Hook