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Testimony of Rep. Cassie Julia introducing
**LD 521, An Act to Prohibit Discrimination in Housing Based on Source of
Income, Veteran Status or Military Status**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Cassie Julia, and I represent House District 65, which is part of Waterville. I'm here today to introduce **LD 521, an Act to Prohibit Discrimination in Housing Based on Source of Income, Veteran Status, or Military Status.**

LD 521 amends the Maine Human Rights Act to prohibit housing discrimination based on an individual's veteran status or source of income. The bill ensures that income from any federal, state or local public assistance program is not used as a reason to automatically disqualify someone from applying for housing.

Currently, in Maine, landlords can refuse to rent to someone based on their source of income or veteran status, leaving many of our most vulnerable citizens at risk. These individuals are already facing tremendous challenges in today's housing market. As lawmakers, it is our responsibility to increase the number of people who are housed in Maine, not make it harder for them and their families to secure safe, affordable housing.

Housing vouchers from the federal and state levels help millions of veterans and low-income households across the country secure stable housing. However, the reality is that landlords in Maine can still turn away people with these vouchers, making it nearly impossible for these individuals to find housing. This is an unfair disadvantage that disproportionately affects people like single parents and veterans.

The waitlist for housing vouchers is years long, and we simply do not have the resources to meet the demand, especially right now. When these vouchers are finally released, the recipient is given

just three months to find somewhere to rent. If they are unable to secure housing within that short time frame, their voucher is rescinded and their name is moved back to the end of the waiting list.

This is an impossible timeline for anyone, even in the best of circumstances. Add the additional stress of calling and writing to every landlord you can find to ask if they accept vouchers, and it becomes an overwhelmingly difficult task. It's like being told you've won the lottery, but you can't find anywhere to cash in your ticket.

For years, coded language has been used to justify these barriers, with the argument that they prevent people from "abusing" the system. But to me, this is less about preventing misuse and more about creating an insurmountable obstacle to building a stable life.

The Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968 and amended in 1989 to include family status because single mothers were often unfairly denied housing, simply for being single mothers. This small but important adjustment made a profound difference in the lives of countless women and their children.

Now, this bill provides us with another opportunity to make a meaningful change. By adding veteran status and source of income to the existing protections, we can fix a broken system without requiring any additional financial investment. This is a change that will make a tremendous difference in the lives of many, without costing the state, federal government or local municipalities a single additional penny.

Maine has been slow to address this issue – 17 other states have already passed similar laws. Let's close this loophole and give people the opportunity to build a better future for themselves and their families.

While I believe removing barriers to stable housing is reason enough to pass this bill, no 2025 proposal would be complete without mentioning potential cost savings.

Child welfare services cite homelessness as a major reason for separating children from their parents and placing those kids into the system. This bill represents a significant step in alleviating that burden. When people cannot find a place to live, we all bear the consequences. If we make it easier to access housing when someone's number comes up on the waitlist, we will undoubtedly reduce strain on other systems. Child welfare, VA support and even public schools can all point to countless instances where the lack of housing is a vastly preventable drain on their resources.

When people have access to stable, affordable housing, they thrive. Veterans, parents and children can feel safe and begin to build a better life for themselves.

After further conversation with the Department of Defense and other advocates supportive of this measure, it was recommended to me that two amendments be made:

1. It was suggested that military families be added to this bill because they too encounter bias and inequitable treatment as it relates to acquiring housing.
2. It was suggested that the following language be added to the bill:

This subsection does not apply to rental housing that is subject to:

- A.** Requirements established by a document or deed recorded by a register of deeds that are designed to keep the housing affordable for tenants with specific income levels;
- B.** Restrictions as a condition of the landlord's receipt of subsidies from or participation in a municipal, state or federal housing program; or
- C.** Restrictions as a condition of the tenant's receipt of subsidies from or participation in a municipal, state or federal housing program.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.