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**Testimony of Andrea Mancuso, on behalf of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence  
In Support of LD 521: “AAT Prohibit Discrimination in Housing Based on Source of Income,  
Veteran Status or Military Status”  
Monday, March 3, 2025**

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, I am writing on behalf of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (MCEDV)<sup>1</sup> in support of LD 251, “An Act to Prohibit Discrimination in Housing Based on Source of Income, Veteran Status or Military Status.”

Access to safe and stable housing is a critical need for any survivor who contemplates separating from the person who is abusing them – particularly those survivors who are also needing to see to the wellbeing of minor children. All too often, after years of abuse – physical, mental and economic – survivors are not well positioned for immediate financial independence and need help and support from their community. Maine’s domestic violence resource centers operate 12 of the state’s emergency shelters. Approximately half of all survivors who were sheltered by our programs in 2024 exited shelter into housing using some form of rental assistance. Advocates within our network are constantly working with survivors across the state, those in shelter and those not in shelter, to try and use rental assistance programs to secure safe, affordable and stable housing for themselves and their children. And this is incredibly hard.

Major barriers to survivors in achieving timely, safe and stable housing after separating from the person who is abusing them importantly include overwhelming administrative burdens at the point of obtaining rental assistance (including a high degree of inconsistency throughout the state on how policies, rules and statutes are implemented by DHHS, housing authorities or local General Assistance programs a); lack of quality housing stock, in both rural and urban communities; and the unwillingness of landlords to work with rental assistance programs. These realities often result in leaving survivors and their children

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<sup>1</sup> MCEDV represents a membership of the eight regional domestic violence resource centers (DVRCs) across Maine as well as two culturally specific services providers. In FY 2024, more than 12,000 survivors sought and received assistance from Maine’s DVRC’s, which provide 24-hour crisis intervention, emergency shelter, legal advocacy, child protective advocacy, and practical assistance to help survivors overcome barriers to achieving safety for themselves and their children.

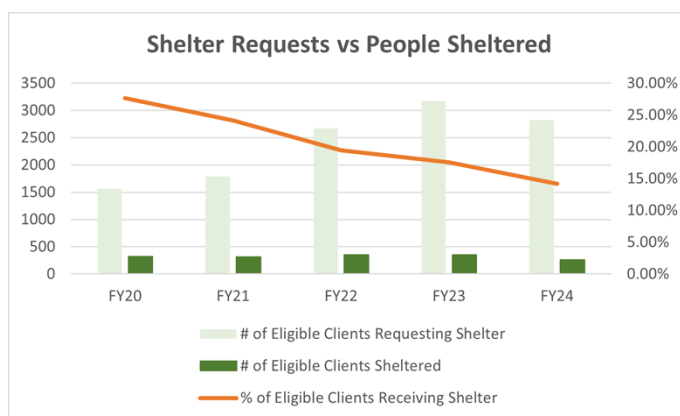
in shelter for much longer periods of time;<sup>2</sup> or result in survivors remaining in a household with the person abusing them when they otherwise would have separated; or, perhaps most concerning, can act to so insufficiently address basic needs in a timely way that a survivor begins to lose hope that real independence remains possible.<sup>3</sup> We encourage this committee to see this bill as needed and as only one part of a broader range of policy changes needed to address all of these barriers and provide more successful and rapid pathways to housing for Maine’s most vulnerable citizens.

In the experience of our network of shelter providers and community advocates, obtaining rental assistance is only the beginning. Many housing providers throughout Maine are disinclined to work with rental assistance programs. Though many do make blanket statements that Section 8 is not accepted, many more structure their application process and rental requirements in a way that functionally eliminates those with rental assistance. That frequently looks like:

- Requiring a double security deposit, knowing that it will not be covered under the Section 8 program;
- Setting rents even only \$25 over what the market rental rate is that rental assistance programs cover for a particular unit size;
- Requiring a renter to perfect the lease within a week of an offer being made, knowing that renters can rarely get the rental assistance programs to respond that quickly.

The domestic violence resource center serving Hancock and Washington counties reports that, in one of their counties, it is rare that they can find a landlord who will accept

<sup>2</sup> Each year, the number of survivors who reach out to us who are able to be sheltered in one of our 12 shelters decreases. While some of this is driven by costs increasing each year without corresponding increases in funding, it is also largely driven by the difficulty in moving people from shelter to safe, stable, and affordable housing in community, independent from the person harming them.



<sup>3</sup> In multiple studies over the last two decades, more than 40% of homeless women consistently report that they remained in an abusive household out of fear of becoming homeless. A majority of homeless women have experienced domestic abuse and violence.



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rental assistance – even those landlords that the DVRC staff have a good relationship with, and even in those cases where a survivor’s circumstances are incredibly compelling. In at least some cases, we’ve observed that the landlord’s reluctance to accept rental vouchers comes from past experience with long delays in rental payments by agencies administering the rental assistance, rather than with the subsidized tenants. There is a need in our state to prevent discrimination based on method of paying for rent, and there is also a critical need to more broadly create incentives for landlords to enthusiastically support those families that need rental assistance to achieve housing stability.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our perspective with you on this bill and the broader need for a comprehensive plan to address housing challenges in our state.

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