

TO: The Honorable Joseph Rafferty, Chair
The Honorable Mike Sylvester, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

DATE: February 17, 2021

RE: LD 211, An Act to Support Emergency Shelter Access for Persons Experiencing Homelessness

Good morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester and honorable members of the joint standing committee on Labor and Housing.

My name is Lado Lodoka. I am here today to testify in support of LD 211 on behalf of the Immigrant Housing Coalition. The Immigrant Housing Coalition is a not for profit organization that supports affordable housing policy through education and advocacy.

For some of us who were not born here, we choose to live in Maine because of its recreational options from the mountains to rivers, forest and ocean. The winter is a little bit longer than some of us will like to admit but it is a small price to pay. One thing that people of Maine struggle with is affordable housing. We have an older housing stock which costs more to maintain. Our demography is also changing. Our population is aging which presents a different challenge to policy makers.

Shelters by definition are supposed to be temporary to address an immediate need to give policymakers an opportunity to address the problem long term. The truth is shelters are now fabric of our communities. Imagine volunteering to serve your country and returning home to struggle with the challenges of your overseas experience unable to get the help you need and ending up unhoused on the streets in Maine. How about working a minimum wage to find yourself in the emergency room. A month later, you're behind on your rent and no way of catching up. You self evict because couch surfing is shameful. How about struggling with substance abuse and losing your house and find yourself on the street. Whatever the reason, homelessness is a symptom of failing public policy rather than individual responsibility.

The number one reason for people to be on the street is lack of affordable housing. According to Maine Wire, 54 percent of households in Maine could not afford to purchase a median home in 2017. Maine's policies are starkly out of line with the rest of the nation. An [analysis](#) by the Cato Institute shows that Maine ranks 44th for land use out of the 50 states, a position Maine held since at least 2000.

Let it be known that no one chooses to be homeless regardless of the challenges they might be facing in life at any given time. While on the street, unhoused people are exposed to physical

harm, limited opportunity to be employed and exposure to unhealthy habits such as substance abuse.

Our economic system is set up to support people who are housed, not an unhoused population. Although homelessness is a result of policy failure, it is left to social workers and advocates to figure out and address the need of unhoused people.

We need to start funding affordable housing at the scale of the demand to stop the pipeline to homelessness. Voting Ought to Pass on LD211 will provide the resources our communities need to keep people warm, feed and healthy in the middle of a pandemic.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I will be happy to entertain any questions you may have.

Lado Lodoka
Immigrant Housing Coalition

I am submitting my testimony in support of the legislation.