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Maine Community Action Partnership Supports LD 473 An Act To Create the Maine Rental Assistance and Voucher Guarantee Program

March 3, 2021

Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester, honorable members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, I am Megan Hannan, Executive Director of Maine Community Action Partnership, and we support LD 473 An Act To Create the Maine Rental Assistance and Voucher Guarantee Program. Maine Community Action Partnership, or MeCAP, is the statewide organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of Maine people by advocating for, promoting and supporting the work of the Maine Community Action Agencies.

First, I would like to thank Rep. Morales for bringing this bill forward. We all know about the housing market in Maine, and now, completely unforeseen by many, it is even tighter thanks to the pandemic. We all know Maine is a great place to live, but who knew a pandemic would convince so many others?

This dynamic will only add to the difficulty working families have finding an affordable place to live, near their jobs and schools. The addition of "housing navigators" is welcome, as they can not only help people to find or keep appropriate, affordable housing, but also can help them budget to ensure they have the funds to pay their share of rent. Having a safety net to count on when you are laid off, furloughed or are simply between jobs means working Mainers can find housing stability that they too often cannot now.

As you probably know, the 10 Community Action Agencies have partnered with MaineHousing to provide rental relief since March of last year, when it became clear that the COVID-19 pandemic was forcing many people to close businesses and lay off workers, and with that hundreds then thousands of Mainers lost their paychecks. We have done this under four different funding sources and four different sets of rules, which, needless to say, made administering the program tricky.

Now, thanks to the Omnibus Spending and COVID Relief Deal former President Trump signed in December, we have \$200 million for a more robust and comprehensive rental assistance program. We now have the ability to pay for utilities and other associated costs, as well as to provide housing stability services, such as helping renters to budget to assure they have sufficient funds next time something happens, and when necessary, to help them to avoid eviction by providing legal and mediation services.

If President Biden's American Rescue Plan passes the Senate, there is another \$25 billion for rent relief, which will bring another \$200 million or so to Maine. In short, we have the funds to provide rent relief right now – but we know this will not last forever, and both of these funding sources have end dates.

Our very real housing crisis is not going to end with this Federal funding. We have not been using these funds to create new programs, so we are not getting to the crux of the problem. That is not lack of interest, but funding limitations. The programs imagined in this bill is a start to solving a problem that we know will last well beyond the pandemic. I hope we can continue to think creatively about other ways to truly fix structural inequities and access to housing for low and moderate income individuals and families.

I am happy to answer any questions that I can, now or in the work session.

Respectfully Submitted,

[Megan Hannan](#)

Executive Director