



Testimony of Travis Heynen, Lewiston Housing

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing Committee

In Support of LD 473, *An Act to Create the Maine Rental Assistance and Voucher Guarantee Program*

March 3, 2021

Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Travis Heynen. I am the Deputy Executive Director at Lewiston Housing. We are the municipal housing authority for the City of Lewiston and serve the communities of Greene, Lisbon, Lisbon Falls, and Sabattus. It is the mission of Lewiston Housing to provide decent, safe, and affordable housing free of discrimination to those eligible persons who are in need of housing assistance and, in so doing, promote economic uplift and personal growth.

Lewiston Housing owns and manages multiple properties with 493 units in Lewiston and administers 1319 housing assistance vouchers in the greater Lewiston area. We also administer the Family Self Sufficiency program and partner with many local community providers to help lift our residents out of poverty.

There are currently 556 people on our rental housing waiting list with wait times varying between 1-6 years, depending on apartment size and location. There are 754 people on our housing voucher waiting list with an average wait time of a year. While applicants wait for safe, affordable housing, they are often living in unsafe homes, extremely rent burdened, or are unhoused and living on the streets, vehicles, or condemned buildings.

Because of this, Lewiston Housing supports a statewide rental assistance program. Federal funding for rental assistance has remained stagnant and does not keep pace with the critical need in our community. While there has been some rent stabilization relief passed as part of the Federal response to Covid, this is temporary. The current waiting lists existed well before Covid and will likely remain after Covid without additional rental assistance.

Lewiston Housing is also very supportive of the housing navigator component of this proposed legislation. In Lewiston, the market for safe rental housing is extremely tight, and it is difficult for people to find safe, affordable housing. People with housing assistance are met with an additional challenge of navigating complex housing guidelines and affordable housing programs. They are often passed by when someone without assistance applies. Housing navigators will link people to housing opportunities and provide support to remain stably housed. This important resource will help applicants find and maintain housing, leading to less turnover and stress, and creating a more efficient and cost saving system.

On behalf of Lewiston Housing, I hope that you will support LD 473 and help create more affordable housing options for people who want to live and work in Maine.

Thank you for your time, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.