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Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher in support of LD 473, An Act to Create the Maine Rental Assistance Program

Senator Joseph Rafferty and Representatives Sylvester and members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, I am Representative Laurie Osher of Orono. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 473, An Act to Create the Maine Rental Assistance Program.

My training is in science. That training includes testing a hypothesis (which is really a fancy word for a guess or an assumption) to determine if it can be supported (which means we gather evidence). The whole process is based on another assumption- that once we have the data support the hypothesis, we use that information to advance, to make change, to do better.

That Maine has an affordable housing shortage is no longer a hypothesis. We know that there are too few rental units and those that are available cost more than people experiencing poverty can afford. Maine's section 8 voucher wait list has 20,000 people on it! Many whose name comes to the top of the list to receive vouchers report not being able to find a place to use the voucher within the time allotted. It is far past time for us to do better.

An extremely low-income family of four that qualifies for section 8 has an annual income below \$25,100. And the income required to afford a 2-bedroom apartment at HUD's fair market rate for Maine is \$41,156. Rental assistance is needed to bridge that gap.

LD 473 is a proposal to create The Maine Rental Assistance and Voucher Guarantee Program, within Maine State Housing Authority. The Program would provide financial help for up to 1,000 Maine households (a fraction of those needing this assistance, but it is a start) and create a network of housing counselors to help people to find and to stay in that affordable housing.

Long before COVID-19 public health recommendations encouraged us to stay home we have known that having a safe place to call home is essential for health. As legislators, it is our job to make policy to improve the lives of Mainers. We know that affordable housing is a basic need. By supporting this bill, we can assist up to 1000 Mainers to have this basic need met. Providing vouchers and assistance for affordable housing is a simple matter of justice.

I encourage you to follow the guidance from the book of Deuteronomy (16:20): "Tzedek, tzedek, tirdof": Justice, Justice thou shalt pursue.

Please vote to support this bill. Thank you.

Laurie Osher
Orono

I may not be available to read my testimony.
Thank you for the opportunity.