

Carolyn Silvius
PORTLAND

Good morning Representative Sylvester, Senator Rafferty, and members of the Labor and Housing committee. My name is Carolyn Silvius from Portland. I am an advocate for Homeless Voices for

Justice. I am here to speak in favor of LD473, which would supplement existing voucher assistance programs and make available help to those who cannot pay full rental prices.

From personal experience, I know how badly this program is needed

In 2016 I was homeless, living in a shelter for ten months. Ten months is a very long time for one not to have a home. The only reason for the long wait was my income and the unavailability of subsidized housing. At that time, my SSI income was a bit over \$600 a month, and the very minimum cost of an apartment, including electricity and heat was about \$1000 per month. Obviously, I couldn't afford to rent and even counting what General Assistance could pay, I was still a couple hundred dollars short. At the shelter, I had a case manager to serve as a housing navigator, but she had a huge caseload of people in the same circumstances as I was in, and because of the lack of assistance programs, she had nowhere to navigate. Bear in mind that those homeless people who are couch surfing or living

outside, and those who are still housed but paying 50% or more of their income for rent, may not have access to a housing navigator and LD473 will help finance more of them. At this time there just aren't enough to go around.

In 2010 I applied for a Section 8 voucher and was told that the waiting list was 7 years. A friend of mine applied at the same time I did. He was already living in public housing at the time. When I became homeless, I knew I still had more than a year to go on the waiting list for Section 8. In desperation, when I was offered public housing, I grabbed it. Anything was better than being homeless. What I didn't realize was that because I was now subsidized, it knocked me down on the Section 8 list. In short, my friend and I now have both been waiting for 10, almost 11 years for our Section 8 vouchers. With 20,000 people on that waiting list, both of us may wait a very long time more.

With the inflation of rental prices that we have been witnessing in the last 10 years, and the numbers of businesses that have been unable to survive the recession related to COVID, homelessness still hasn't reached its peak in Maine. While this bill will not, by itself, solve the homeless situation it is a large step toward keeping people housed.

Please cast your vote in favor of LD473.