

Hailey Virusso
Portland

My name is Hailey Virusso, and I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker residing in Portland. I am writing to testify in support of LD 473: An Act To Create the Maine Rental Assistance and Voucher Guarantee Program. Our community is in dire need of affordable and safe housing: it is clear that the current offerings are not meeting the intense demand in our community. The waitlists for subsidies are astronomical, rendering individuals and families without any form of safety. Housing is the most basic of needs and without affordability, we are sending a clear message to our community that housing is a privilege, rather than a right. Every person deserves the right to have a safe place to live. Safe housing is a social determinant of health and we have seen firsthand the impact that Covid has had on our community's housing crisis: increasing rents and low vacancy rates continue to pose more and more barriers to the success of our state. LD 473 offers options that benefit tenants and landlords and ensure wraparound services for individuals and families through housing navigation. Working with families experiencing homelessness in Maine, I have witnessed the impact of lack of affordable housing. More and more families are forced to leave their home communities to live in motels, rely on public assistance while continuing to balance their work and family needs. Many of these individuals are working full-time and are still unable to pay "fair-market" rent. The three-pronged approach offered in LD 473 fills gaps in our current housing offerings and would demonstrate to the state of Maine that we truly care about every child, individual and family. When making your decision, please consider what the experience of homelessness looks like, what it feels like to contact hundreds of apartments a week to be turned away, to fit a family of four in a single motel room. Passing LD 473 is a statement that you condemn the current state of our housing market because you know that Mainers deserve better opportunities than this.