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**Testimony of Representative Kristen Cloutier
in support of LD 1397, An Act Directing the Maine State Housing Authority To Create a
Commission To Develop a Comprehensive Rental Registry for Multifamily Housing
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing**

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, I am Kristen Cloutier and I proudly represent House District 60, part of Lewiston. I am here today in support of **LD 1397, An Act Directing the Maine State Housing Authority To Create a Commission To Develop a Comprehensive Rental Registry for Multifamily Housing**.

As a former municipal official from the second largest city in Maine, and one currently undergoing a substantial revitalization, I can speak directly to the positive impact such a registry would have on my district and in my community.

In 2018, the City of Lewiston created its own Rental Registration Committee, comprised of the Director of Code and Planning, two City Councilors (from opposing ends of the political spectrum), our Building/Plumbing Inspector, our Fire Inspector, a member of our police force, several property owners, and two members of the Lewiston Area Public Health Committee. It was a well-rounded group that sought to protect the health and safety of our residents by ensuring the health and safety of our rental properties, and to attract and support property owners who are committed to providing safe and healthy housing.

One of the primary reasons for implementing such a registry was the high incidence of childhood lead poisoning resulting from the age and deterioration of our housing stock. As I am sure you are all aware, lead is a poison that affects virtually every system in the human body, and is particularly harmful to the developing brain and nervous system of fetuses and young children.

Cities like Lewiston are working hard to address lead paint hazards in rental properties, and have benefited greatly as recipients of various lead hazard control grants from the federal Housing and Urban Development Department. Attracting responsible property owners and developers to the area helps to build upon this work by providing another means of redeveloping these properties and bringing them up to code. Lewiston is fortunate to be the home base of Healthy Homeworks, a community organization dedicated to attracting to our market compassionate,

responsible, committed individuals looking to purchase multifamily properties, helping them to evaluate buildings, and then mentoring them through the process of renovating, leasing up, and managing safe, high quality, affordable units. What I have heard time and time again from this organization and others, is that data on these properties is not readily available to tenants or buyers, at least not in a timely manner that allows stakeholders to access it when they need it. Currently, the only way to get a list of properties under a lead abatement order is through an FOIA request, which can sometimes take several months to fulfill and are already out of date upon receipt. How can buyers or tenants make responsible, informed financial and life decisions when this vital information is so difficult to procure? Without it, buyers are waiting and missing opportunities, and families continue to live in unsafe housing.

The creation of a statewide rental registry would provide further transparency and efficiency to the work being done in Lewiston and serves to benefit property owners, developers and residents across the state by protecting their investments and assuring access to safe and affordable housing.

I am pleased to be a cosponsor of this bill, I urge the committee to support it, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.