

130th Maine Legislature

Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

Testimony of Amanda Olson, Maine Association of Public Housing Directors in Opposition to

LD 1464 An Act to Improve Accessibility of Affordable Housing Data

April 26, 2021

Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Amanda Olson, Executive Director of Augusta Housing Authority and I am here today representing the Maine Association of Public Housing Directors.

The Maine Association of Public Housing Directors is comprised of Executive Directors from Maine's more than 20 Housing Authorities. Together we address the need for affordable housing through diverse strategies and housing programs including the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

I am testifying today in opposition to LD 1464. The bill before the committee creates a duplicative reporting requirement and an undue and costly burden on Maine's public housing authorities. We agree that access to housing data is important and would like to ensure that the committee is aware of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development's Housing Choice Voucher Data Dashboard, which offers real-time instant access to data relating to voucher utilization for the state of Maine as a whole and individual housing authorities within the state. [Housing Choice Voucher \(HCV\) Data Dashboard | HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\)](#)

To comply with the additional reporting requirements outlined in the proposed bill before you would come with a significant price tag to Maine housing authorities, who are already overburdened and underfunded due to prorated administrative fees at the federal level. The proration has been long standing and has resulted in funding levels at 80% or below the funding amount it takes to administer the voucher program. Additional reporting requirements would make it even more difficult to serve Maine people and would take staff time away from supporting those who need support and resources in utilizing their voucher.

The bill before you asks for reporting of reasons why vouchers were not used. It is important to note that in 2020, Maine housing authorities used 101.36% of budget authority to lease at total of 11,732 vouchers. This means that together, we used all available budget authority and some additional reserve funding. There were no unused funds for this rental assistance program. While we used all funding available, this amount was only able to support 89% of available vouchers under contract statewide. Although our percentage is actually better than the national average, it speaks to a national problem where housing authorities simply cannot afford to lease 100% of vouchers with the amount of federal subsidy provided annually. To change this percentage would require an increase in subsidy at the federal level to support the significantly increasing cost per unit it takes to subsidize each voucher. This is due to increasing housing costs and lack of affordable housing.

In 2020, in a spirit similar to that of this bill, MAPHD conducted a study to determine the reason for any voucher expirations in a way similar to that proposed in LD 1464. Although we set out on this project

together with the best of intentions, in practical reality we found that the process was extremely labor intensive for staff, took time away from our ability to help those we serve and resulted in minimal data. Although the reason for many voucher expirations could not be determined due to no response or lost contact, those we were able to connect with pointed to what we know is our greatest challenge; lack of affordable housing inventory.

To summarize, we oppose this bill as this additional reporting requirement would provide no additional benefit in terms of new data and would place an expensive and undue administrative burden on Maine housing authorities in a way that would take time away from those we serve and hurt Maine people who need our support in housing search and stability now more than ever.

Thank you.