

Jennifer McKenna
Gardiner

"Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing: my name is Jennifer McKenna, I am a resident of Gardiner and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1656.

This bill represents two major opportunities to help Maine people create the stability needed to stay and work in Maine. Through affordable housing they will have a place to call home for themselves and their families. This project will also create high demand green construction industry job training opportunities that are best taught by the earn while you learn registered apprenticeship model.

I have been the training Director of Local 716 Plumbers Pipefitters and HVAC Technicians since 2010 and have served hundreds of Apprentices in our program on their journey towards becoming a master craftsman in our trades. One of the biggest challenges is getting the apprentice through their first year, when they are typically very green in the trade and make around \$16.50 plus benefits. It's almost impossible to find them housing at this wage and many have gotten roommates, stayed in seasonal hotels, or couch surfed with family or friends.

By their second year in Apprenticeship, our students are making \$18.00 and the apartment search should be a little easier, but it's not. After searching for months and piecing together shelter options together, most apprentices settle for a location out of their neighborhood quality and required price point, this almost always will require them to have to travel a significant distance to work.

Our 4th and 5th year apprentices normally are well on their way to a college degree, a national certificate stating their Journeyworker status and Multiple licenses and certs. At this point they are making over \$30/hr, significant benefits for retirement and healthcare, at this point they have all the components of financial stability that an excellent career in a Building Trades Apprenticeship provides. The only problem is that they still can't find affordable housing. Their rent is so high, it is difficult and nearly impossible to save for a down payment, and when they do, there are multiple bidders on same property. An apprentice shared a story with me that he and his wife had put bids in on over 40 homes unsuccessfully already in past years, with most final sales going well over the asking price.

The demand for affordable housing for the working person is well over 20,000 housing units, the need is real. Maine people want to work hard, but for a purpose a future to be proud of, a career instead of a job. Maine people want to live and work in Maine, but can't find an affordable option to do so. We have an opportunity with LD1656 to utilize the Registered Apprenticeship model to train Maine people on these green housing construction jobs. Most importantly we have an opportunity to provide an energy efficient home, an affordable home, here in Maine for the average working person, the person that cares about living in and building a community.