

Vanessa STASSE
Lewiston

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing: my name is Vanessa Stasse, I am a resident of 75 Maple street in Lewiston and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1656.

In 2013, after a divorce, I had to “start over.” Making less than \$20,000 a year with two small children, I lived many years with roommates in order to make ends meet. They did not always meet. As my financial situation improved, I was in turn able to host and rescue people that were in need of a temporary shelter until they could find something decent. But the distress of securing safe housing is increasing all around me. I work as an interpreter in my community, and I have witnessed countless such stories. I have time to tell you only the two most recent ones.

Last Saturday morning, I received a call from a friend who lives with his wife in Biddeford. They were asking me for help in finding housing. This winter, they lived in an apartment where the heat did not go over 62 degrees, when the law requires a minimum of 68. Sometimes, they had to turn the oven on to get extra heat. There are also infested by mice and rats. They complained to their landlord, who simply said he would not be renewing their lease this year. My friend is a skilled carpenter and makes a good living. They are willing to travel up to an hour to go to work in order to find somewhere to live, yet, the home they are looking for is elusive.

Two days before that, I had a single mother with a 3 year old child, who called because her electricity had been cut off. She had not been able to pay her bills, because she is an asylum seeker and has not yet received her work permit. She has to get by on \$670 from TANF, to feed, clothe, and house her family. Her housing alone is \$700. You do the math. How can she meet her needs while being prohibited to work?

Affordable housing is a necessity for every human being. It's easy to forget, once you've gotten your own house in a nice neighborhood, that the lack of safe housing is a great mental burden. It's a basic need: we are all here on earth – we all deserve shelter, and a place to call home.

Thank you.