

Lacey Donle  
Lisbon Falls  
LD 2003

Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing: my name is Lacey Donle, I am a resident of Lisbon Falls and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 2003.

I have worked in the social services field for the past 17 years, and spent about 10 years working with youth and families experiencing homelessness. Currently I work with older adults in the community, many of whom are experiencing significant medical, cognitive and mobility issues, and are at risk of experiencing homelessness. Some are literally homeless, bouncing from hospital to shelter, hotel to hotel, walker and Foley bag in tow, not knowing where they are going to stay night to night.

During my work as a housing navigator for Maine Housing's Emergency Shelter Housing Assistance Program (ESHAP) in which agencies serving people experiencing homelessness have direct access to Housing Choice Vouchers for clients, I saw first hand how serious the housing crisis is in Maine. When the barrier of long wait-lists was removed and people had a Section 8 voucher in hand that they could use anywhere in Maine, it was extremely challenging to find a place to rent.

Every person deserves the choice of where to live. I worked with parents who would drive their children over an hour one way so the child could play softball for their town of origin, and helped parents navigate superintendents agreements so their kids could stay in the school where they felt supported and could learn best. These parents had to move to a town outside their school district or far from them and their children's family, friends, schools, medical providers, and community supports because they could not find any rental housing in their home area. These parents were fleeing domestic violence, staying in shelters and places not meant for human habitation. They only had 120 days on their voucher to find a place and move in, or lose the voucher. At the end of the day, they all found a place to rent and moved in, but again, each one had to move a significant distance from their home town.

We need more housing in Maine in general, we especially need more affordable housing, and we need to start thinking of people who are struggling with homelessness and housing insecurity as "me and us", rather than "you and them". Most people are just one bad day away from housing insecurity, one car accident with an uninsured motorist, totalling your car so you can't get to work, you lose your job for missing work and it's all down hill from there. My partner drove his coworker who had the car accident to and from work for a week until she could figure out something else. Now she still has a job and her housing. The situation could have gone very differently.

People with low income are people, not others. People of Color, people who do not speak English and have large families are People. If we see people as people, as us, not them, we can see the strength in diversity, the opportunities for connection and community. We don't need to be afraid of what will happen to our towns if we open up more affordable housing opportunities, we need to be afraid of what will happen if we don't.

Please support LD 2003 because we are all in this together, and Mainers deserve housing opportunities in every community.

Thank you.

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