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Testimony of Rep. Victoria Morales cosponsoring
**LD 1337, An Act To Increase Affordable Housing and
Reduce Property Taxes through an Impact Fee on Vacant
Residences**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation

Good morning, Senator Chipman, Representative Terry, and members of the Taxation Committee. My name is Victoria Morales and I represent South Portland in House District 33. It is my honor to cosponsor **LD 1337, An Act to Encourage the Renovation of Available Housing Stock.**

We are in the worst housing crisis Maine has ever seen. It is 27% worse than it was in 2019, when we were also in a housing crisis. As a State, we invest only .00643% of our state budget on housing.

Some more Maine housing facts:

- Maine lacks 20,000 housing units of affordable and workforce housing.
- 25,000 Maine households are on the 3-7 year waiting list for Federal Section 8 housing vouchers. This is up from 19,000 households in 2019.
- 141,700 Maine people live in poverty. 10.9% of Maine's population. That is a family of four making less than 26,000 per year.
- According to testimony from DHHS yesterday, 10,000 people a month have been contacting DHHS for support this past year.
- 59% of Maine renters spend half of their income on housing. Housing is considered affordable if folks are spending 30% of their income or less on housing.

- 26% of those experiencing homelessness are members of Maine’s Black, brown and indigenous communities, which make up less than 2% of Maine’s entire population.
- 5,500 evictions occur every year, largely impacting women and children.
- Once evicted, that eviction record is a barrier to applying for future housing.
- If tenants have attorneys representing them, they are 85% less likely to be evicted in Maine. Only 20% have attorneys.
- In 2019, between 2,500 and 3,000 students were homeless. That number likely has doubled since the pandemic according to reports.
- 53% of the young people incarcerated in Maine are only there for their care, because they have no home to go to, not because they are a public safety risk.

I support this bill and the incredible amount of work Rep. Kessler has put into this effort because the need is so great to change the narrative on housing here in Maine and the time to do it is now. This bill has been discussed at length with the Legislative Housing Working Group that meets every Wednesday at 8 a.m. We all understand so clearly that structural changes to how we fund housing and what we prioritize for funding is necessary.

Nationally, we have all been learning that housing is really an integral part of our infrastructure. Without access to safe and affordable housing, one cannot access the benefits of health care, nutrition, education, or job opportunities. Pursuant to Maslow’s Pyramid of Needs, housing must come first.

From a financial perspective, we also know through research and data around the country that when we provide housing, with supports, even folks who are arguably the most difficult to house due to mental illness and/or substance use disorder, stay successfully housed and as a result do not have the need to utilize our most expensive emergency services, such as shelters, courts, jails, emergency rooms, and other benefit programs.

It is my firm belief that no child, individual, or family should be housing insecure, housing cost burdened, or houseless. No child or adult should be imprisoned or kept in prison or jail because they have no home to go to. No one in Maine should be without a home for more than 90 days, just like our policy for veterans. We can accomplish these goals if we set our policies in that direction, if we coordinate our efforts between state and local governments, nonprofits, and for profits, and if we commit to sustainable funding, as proposed with this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about this important policy.