



Testimony before the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
An Act to Establish the Winter Energy Relief Payment Program to Aid Residents with High Heating Costs and to Finalize the COVID Pandemic Relief Payment Program
December 21, 2022

Senator Jackson, Representative Talbot Ross and Members of the Committee:

I am Rev. Jane Field, the Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches. The Council has seven member-denominations and two associate member congregations who represent 437 local churches in Maine with 55,000 parishioners. I am testifying on behalf of the Council **in support of LD 3**.

In recent weeks, we at the Council have heard from many local clergy and lay leaders around the state who are profoundly troubled by the daily phone calls and visits they're receiving from Maine families desperate and afraid they will be losing their housing on December 31. Families with children. Pregnant mothers-to-be. People recovering from surgery. Terrified they will be turned out into the freezing cold with nowhere to go. Our state's shelters are full. So are our warming centers. Some churches are scrambling to get permission to provide emergency accommodations in their own buildings so that their frightened neighbors will at least have somewhere to get out of the weather for a few nights if they become homeless just ten days from now—but that's not a workable nor a long-term solution for these families.

With the end of eviction moratoria and emergency rental assistance, in over 100 cities and towns across Maine, more than 8,500 households are in danger of being impacted. People across the state are receiving eviction notices when it is bitter cold. These are our neighbors and they need us. They need you, the leaders of our state to wade into the midst of the terror of this looming humanitarian crisis and offer the immediate, humane, compassionate solution of the \$21 million of funding for short-term emergency housing that LD 3 would provide.

We at the Council were heartened when the original version of this bill passed the House on December 7 with a resounding majority. And we were dismayed and appalled just hours later when a handful of Senators blocked its passage in the Senate. We thank you, Senator Jackson and Representative Talbot Ross for not giving up in the face of that crushing blow, and for working across the aisle to quickly move the legislature to this Plan B for an emergency hearing. We urge this committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 3, and we implore all legislators to do the right thing and vote "yes" when the bill comes to the floor for consideration.

The German-American rabbi, Joachim Prinz, famous for his opposition to the rise of Nazism, once wisely said, "'Neighbor' is not a geographic term. It is a moral concept." Whether a family has lived up in the County for generations or has lived in a Howard Johnson's in South Portland for a few months while seeking asylum in our country, *they are all our neighbors*. And we at the Maine Council of Churches, whose faith is rooted in Hebrew and Christian scripture (where the message is clear: the way we are to honor God is to be just to our neighbor, to welcome the refugee, to protect the vulnerable, and to organize society around the needs of the poor and marginalized), urge you to see the moral imperative for providing funding for short-term emergency housing for all our neighbors who face the unimaginable threat of being turned out in the cold with nowhere to go.