



Testimony before the Committee on Housing
LD 1710: The Housing Opportunities for Maine (HOME) Act
May 12, 2023

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and Members of the Committee:

I am Rev. Jane Field, Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches. The Council has seven mainline Protestant member-denominations and two associate member congregations who represent 437 local churches in Maine with 55,000 parishioners in their care. I am testifying on behalf of the Council **in support of LD 1710.**

All of the MCC churches have roots in Hebrew and Christian scripture, where the foundation of morality is love of neighbor as self and where covenant with God includes caring for our vulnerable and marginalized neighbors while building a society where people nurture and protect one another and ensure that everyone has a safe place to call home. The biblical moral imperative for justice compels us to go beyond compassion and charity and to respond systemically. In the current housing crisis we are facing, this means, among other things, working to ensure that more Maine families can stay in the homes they are currently renting.

LD 1710 will accomplish that by putting more homes in reach for Mainers in every part of our state and giving families the freedom to choose the neighborhoods where they live. Through legal protection for renters and by strengthening the administration and efficiency of Maine's GA system, this bill addresses the current hardship faced by 58% of low-income Mainers who use more than half of their income just to pay rent. Because Maine's rental market is among the least affordable in the nation, without this relief, too many of our neighbors will continue to face displacement, eviction, and homelessness. By imposing a modest increase in the tax on high-end real estate deals, we can address this disparity—a disparity that disproportionately impacts people of color and those with disabilities.

Caring for our vulnerable and marginalized neighbors in this way and building a society where Mainers nurture and protect one another and ensure that all of us have a safe and affordable place to call home aligns with a number of the Maine Council of Churches' values as stated in our Moral Agenda, a document that calls us to advocate for:

- Enactment of policies that benefit the most vulnerable
- Tax and budget policies that reduce disparities between rich and poor
- Sustainable communities marked by affordable housing.

For these reasons, the Maine Council of Churches urges you to vote OUGHT TO PASS on LD 1710.