



Testimony of
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Before
The Committee on Health and Human Services

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST
LD 709 An Act to Support Home Share Programming for Seniors

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Erik Jorgensen, Senior Director of Government Relations and Communications at the Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing) and I am submitting this testimony regarding **LD 709 An Act to Support Home Share Programming for Seniors**.

MaineHousing has been helping Maine people own, rent, repair, and heat their homes since 1969. We are an independent state authority (not a state agency) created to address the problems of unsafe, unsuitable, overcrowded, and unaffordable housing. We are authorized to issue bonds to finance single family mortgages for first time homebuyers and for affordable multi-family housing.

We are also authorized to administer a number of state and federal programs, including rental subsidies, weatherization, fuel assistance, two housing block grants, the low-income housing tax credit program, and homeless grant programs. We receive state general fund revenue for homeless programs and receive a dedicated portion of the real estate transfer tax for the Housing Opportunities for Maine (HOME) Fund.

This is an intriguing concept and it certainly appears to meet a need. I know that home sharing for older homeowners is a practice that has been endorsed by AARP, and when Rep. O’Neil suggested we look at the Nesterly website, it was clear to me that such a service has a great deal of potential. It would seem that by automating the home-sharing “matchmaking” process, it could do a lot to alleviate potential worries of the homeowner around liability and screening, while helping the home-seeker find a place to stay.

We understand based on an early draft sponsor amendment that the bill calls on MaineHousing to convene an advisory and stakeholder group. We would be happy to do that in order to study this issue, though the specific goals of such a group may well have changed since the initial bill draft we saw.

We would, however, respectfully request that the HOME Fund be removed from this bill as a specified funding source, as that resource is currently over-allocated to a myriad of other existing housing programs. To add additional on-going expectations of funding to a new program in its early conceptual phase (this one or any other) using the HOME Fund is something we are not be able to support.

That said, MaineHousing is willing to coordinate the planning process, and we would certainly consider providing initial funding needed to establish such a program, though we have not seen a precise estimate of cost at this point, and so can't commit right now. It is not clear to us that MaineHousing is the correct long-term home for such a program should it move beyond a pilot phase, but given our understanding that this is likely to result in a program based on a third-party online platform, the program may not necessarily need to reside within our organization or, for that matter, within state government after the initial startup period.

We look forward to working with the sponsor and the committee in ironing out details. From personal experience, I can say that intergenerational home sharing opportunities can be very successful, and that this practice might offer another incremental, practical, and socially beneficial step toward overcoming Maine's housing shortage.