



**Testimony of Jena Jones on Behalf of
the Maine Council on Aging to the Committee on
Health and Human Services**

**In Favor of LD 709, An Act to Support Home Share
Programming for Seniors**

Delivered on April 19, 2023

Greetings, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and the members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.

My name is Jena Jones, and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 135 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. I am testifying in favor of LD 709.

Rates of homelessness among older adults are on the rise nationally and Maine's shortage of affordable housing options ensures those trends are represented within our state. People 65 and older represent the fastest growing age group among the homeless and roughly half of homeless adults are over 50. According to projections by the Joint Center for Housing Studies, the number of people over the age 75 living alone nationally is set to nearly double—from 6.9 million in 2015 to 13.4 million in 2035. Many older people will have limited financial resources for housing and women will make up nearly 75% of this group.

As housing pressures rise across the state, we are hearing more and more stories of older people whose rents are being raised way beyond their means, whose apartments are being converted into condos that they cannot afford, and whose apartment building has been sold to a new owner who is eager to move long term tenants out.

At the same time, we know many older adults are living in homes where they raised their families and have more living space than they currently need. The rising costs of living and property taxes are stretching their capacity to stay in their homes.

Home sharing programs can bring together people who need housing with those who have more space in their homes than they need.

LD 709 proposes that Maine develops a Home Share Pilot Program to plan, design, launch, and study how this housing arrangement can benefit both those older people in need of housing and those who have space and need help in covering the costs of maintaining their home.

While home sharing is a creative and viable solution to both of these problems, some planning and infrastructure is needed to ensure that the home shares are safe and effective for all involved.

LD 709 calls for the creation of a stakeholder group with representation from varied individuals and organizations with knowledge and expertise in housing, housing advocacy, and older adult services and older people who are directly affected by these housing issues. This stakeholder group is charged with researching successful models of home sharing and their funding, designing criteria for implementation by the Maine State Housing Authority, and identifying a process for evaluation. We know a home sharing program will need to provide guidance for homeowners seeking renters (how to decide about the amount of rent, how to get background checks done, application processes, etc.) and for renters seeking to share, as well as mediation and support for managing any challenges that may arise.

LD 709 also requires at least two pilot projects to implement the home sharing program as designed. This process will undoubtedly reveal aspects of the planning that work well and other aspects that sound great in theory but don't work as well in real life. Feedback from people participating in the pilot projects will be valuable in the evaluation and ultimate improvement process.

Funding for this project is anticipated to come from the HOME Funds which are specifically designed for projects like this one.

Home sharing has great potential to alleviate Maine's housing challenges by providing housing for those who might otherwise be made homeless and by enabling homeowners to stay in their homes. The Home Share Pilot Program as outlined in LD 709 will build strategies to enable a successful implementation of home sharing and build the comfort level of all involved so that this innovative solution can truly benefit all of us who may need it.

The MCOA urges this committee to support the efforts of LD 709.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions.

Jena Jones