



**Testimony of Marge Kilkelly on Behalf of
the Maine Council on Aging to the
Committee on Housing and Economic Development**

**In Favor of LD 996 An Act to Create the Weatherization
Plus Program and Weatherization Plus Fund**

Submitted April 9, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development.

My name is Marge Kilkelly, and I am a Policy Consultant for the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA) which is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 140 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. The MCOA is a unifying force across sectors that is creating a new narrative about aging and older people in Maine with the goal of building local, statewide, and national support for the systemic changes needed to support our new longevity.

My testimony is in favor of LD 996 An Act to Create the Weatherization Plus Program and Weatherization Plus Fund.

Mainers are living longer than ever before. With a relatively healthy older population, older adults are remaining active in our workforce, leading civic and social organizations, and developing into an impressive volunteer corp. This is good news.

Unfortunately, with new longevity comes some significant new challenges, particularly in relation to housing. Maine also has the 8th oldest housing stock in the country and older adults tend to live in older, inefficient homes that are often not suited to their needs.

Because older Mainers are fiercely independent and proud, they often don't reach out for help until they're in crisis. The house is very cold, a spouse has died, the roof is caving in, or the stairs have become an insurmountable obstacle to accessing the bathroom. When folks finally admit they can no longer stay at home, they call their local agency on aging to find housing that can accommodate their needs and budgets.

Sadly, these older adults quickly discover there are no available affordable housing units in nearly all of Maine. With a shortage of at least 20,000 affordable housing units, and an anticipated need of 84,000 new units by 2030, these older adults in crisis learn they may have to wait between 3 and 5 years to access needed affordable housing.

This situation leaves too many older folks with little choice but to live in homes that are unsafe and in conditions that are unhealthy. They look for ways to modify their homes, but find very few, if any, affordable or free home repair efforts that can help them make needed repairs.

The focus on "weatherization readiness" includes protecting a building from the outside weather elements and improving energy efficiency. All of Maine has experienced devastating weather events in the past few

years that have shown us that need to prepare is real and when our homes are ready for extreme weather events, we are less likely to need to be rescued or find ourselves in seriously dangerous situations.

A 2024 report Quantifying Maine's Household Energy Burden and Affordability Gap estimated that over 200,000 Maine households are facing unaffordable home energy burdens. While this burden is especially true for low income households, even moderate income households face home energy gaps of nearly \$700. 29% of older Mainers live in low income families.

Improving home energy efficiency result in cost savings that can impact the entire quality of life:

Lower Energy bills may mean not falling behind on utility bills and having credit status impacted.

Reduced Energy burden on household budget is also reduced stress on the family and providing resources for other basic necessities.

Enhanced Comfort is particularly important for older people and people living with disabilities who may spend more time in the home and have their health negatively impacted by temperatures that are too cold in winter and too hot in summer.

Safer Homes reducing the use of unsafe practices like heating by leaving a cooking stove on or multiple space heaters that draw on the electric system.

Improved indoor air quality protects the health of everyone in the household and potentially reduces or lessens the impact of respiratory illness.

LD 966 takes an important first step toward a vision for home repair services in Maine – one that ensures all residents can have access. Right now, we have a patchwork of home repair and weatherization services – with some towns and counties rich with volunteer programs, and other towns and counties with no volunteer programs and long waitlists for services through the CAPs. We need to invest more in this process to ensure the quality of our housing stock for future generations, help older people remain in their homes safer and longer.

This legislation should be viewed as a critical investment in a Housing Capital Improvement Plan. As we see the need for housing increasing we must both build new units and maintain the current housing stock to be a safe and welcoming place not only for our older folks today but for future generations. And, as with any Capital need, the cost only increases over time.

I urge you to act in support of LD 996. Weatherization Plus Programs are as a priority investment that will keep older people living more safely at home.

Thank you for your consideration.