

February 1, 2023

Dear Members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing,

My name is Carter Friend and I am the Executive Director of York County Community Action/Nasson Health Care. As both a Community Action Agency and federally qualified health center, we provide a range of health, education and supportive services to the residents of York County.

We want to thank the Legislative leadership for its commitment to addressing Maine's affordable housing crisis and for creating this important committee in order to turn sound ideas into action. We hope that, as your work unfolds over the course of the session, you will feel free to contact us for data and information that can help you as you move forward.

The affordable housing crisis is so complex and pervasive that crafting meaningful responses can seem overwhelming. At YCCAC/Nasson, we are using a framework that addresses homelessness/housing stability, housing safety and quality, affordability, and community vitality. We use this framework as a broad guide to help us design and deliver responsive care and services across multiple populations. Here is a very brief outline of how this framework has helped us to target our efforts.



***Homelessness and Housing Instability***

Chronically homeless people lack access to nutrition, warmth, and regular health care; and they experience increased exposure to trauma, violence and sexually transmitted and infectious diseases. Chronically homeless people have poorer health and shorter life expectancy than the population at large. When they do receive health treatment, it is often in the most expensive settings, such as an emergency department, in-patient hospital, or jail.

Studies have shown that even people who are housed, but experience instability in their housing (e.g., frequent moves, eviction or foreclosure threat, couch surfing) exhibit poorer health compared to stably housed peers, including increased substance misuse, anxiety, depression and suicide.

YCCAC/Nasson Health Care provides a range of resources to address the needs of homeless York County residents, including primary health care, behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment, access to income support, transportation, along with other supportive services. We provide housing navigation and foreclosure prevention for residents in unstable housing.

### ***Cost Burdened Households***

The New York Times recently ran a piece indicating that the number of Americans who are 'cost burdened' by housing expenses has hit an all-time high. Maine Housing indicates that over 40% of Mainers are cost burdened, and these numbers are even higher in York and Cumberland Counties.

At YCCAC, we take a two-pronged approach to address this issue. First, we deliver various programs designed to stabilize and increase household income, including financial assistance for rent and heat (through programs such as ERA and HEAP), access to skills training, budget counseling, and tax preparation, among others.

Second, we recognize that the primary driver of escalating cost is that the supply of suitable housing is inadequate. Therefore, we are working actively as an organization and in partnership with others to encourage the construction of additional units, urging continued housing investment and advocating for the implementation of zoning and permitting practices that incentivize expanded development.

### ***Housing Safety and Quality***

Maine has very old housing stock. Much of the housing occupied by extremely low income people (those with incomes at or below 30% of the area median) is substandard or marginally habitable. Poor quality housing is a direct cause of serious illnesses, including respiratory disorders, such as asthma, and lead poisoning. Moreover, prolonged exposure to inadequate warmth can, overtime, lead to cardiovascular disease or even hypothermia. Like our sister Community Action Agencies, YCCAC delivers a number of home repair, weatherization and heating system repair/replacement programs designed to improve the safety and affordability of housing and help moderate utility costs by conserving energy consumption.

### ***Community Vitality***

In order to be healthy and prosperous, people need to live within reasonable access to essential services such as grocery stores, schools, health care providers, recreational outlets and more. In our role as a designated Regional Transportation Provider, YCCAC works in partnership with municipal leaders, community development experts and housing developers to facilitate such access. In addition, we know that, when it comes to developing new housing, very rural communities are often overlooked. Small project development, which is needed and appropriate in many of Maine's small towns including those in York County, is often not commercially feasible for large scale developers. YCCAC continues to advocate for policies and programs that will preserve existing housing in very rural communities and attract new investments.

YCCAC/Nasson Health Care is eager to work closely with your committee to make real progress to resolve Maine's housing crisis. We hope you will consider us your partners in the work going forward, and we extend our appreciation for your hard work on behalf of Maine residents.

Sincerely,

Carter Friend  
Executive Director