

# Maine Climate Action **NOW!**

To: Maine Legislature Committee on Housing  
From: Jess Falero, Maine Climate Action Now  
Date: April 4, 2023  
Re: LD 2: An Act To Address Maine's Housing Crisis  
OUGHT TO PASS

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and Honorable members of the Committee on Housing, my name is Jess Falero. I am a resident of Portland and a Climate Justice Coordinator for Maine Climate Action Now, a statewide coalition of grassroots organizations who support transformative action in response to the climate crisis. We hold social, racial, and economic justice as critical to the transition to zero carbon emissions by 2030 and believe bold community-led action will make for a more resilient Maine.

When we talk about people being unhoused it's mostly in ways that aren't meaningful. Such as our moral judgments of referring people to as lazy, a drug addict, etc etc. When you walk into your local grocery store in Portland, there's actually an encampment right on the other side of the fence. And if you listen you'll hear someone say "that's just disgusting." You'll hear the sound of people locking their cars in the parking lot. But very rarely do you hear someone say "I hope they're okay." But what I hope you realize by the end of my testimony is that it's never been about a moral failing, but a systemic failure.

As a young person who has experienced being chronically unhoused at a young age and someone who actively works in the field, I know first hand the trauma being unhoused does to a person. We talk about being unhoused as a moral failing or a perceived lack of ethics. But the reality is being unhoused, (regardless of shelter status or un-sheltered status) is traumatic in and of itself.

My personal story is deeply tied into this piece of legislation. At a very young age I experienced being unhoused after spending most of my childhood in state custody with fluctuating care-givers. This experience of being raised in state custody led me to live in close to 200 different institutions from ages 7-17. Now I'm not sharing for pity, and I'm certainly not looking for a hand out. What I am looking for is systemic change. Because there are too many young people who are just like me, experiencing the violence of being unhoused after living their lives being traumatized in institutions. These institutions are often quick to lay on top of you to the point of physical and mental injury and unwilling to provide the humanity and care that is needed to coach a child through these experiences.

My experience is definitely not unique, and I could go on to tell you stories of people I have met while unhoused, and whom I loved; who helped me survive and I them. Each of them is no longer with us, all having died in the last two years.

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I won't do that, but I will say this:

Children with high Adverse Childhood Experiences are more likely to experience many long term health conditions, poverty, and homelessness; as well as putting them at high risk of being sex trafficked or labor trafficked.

Healing from consecutive traumatic events is not a linear process and cannot begin while actively being unhoused. Healing from such traumatic events sometimes means living with mental health and behavioral consequences as a result. People who use drugs, for example, are more often than not using it to cope with unprocessed complex trauma from experiences of being chronically unhoused.

Site-based Housing First as proposed in this bill does not mean "housing only." The evidence-based model of site-based housing first includes providing the support necessary to maintain housing which is especially effective for vulnerable populations.

(Chronic homelessness is a status referring to the length at which a person has experienced being unhoused and the rate - meaning 12 months in a three year period. A person must have been homeless for a year or more than four times in the last three years if that number equals 12 months.)

As a justice focused coalition we call for equity for all Mainers as we unify to fight the climate crisis. We know a solution to homelessness is housing. But Preble Street and Avesta Housing have shown us that the solution to *chronic* homelessness is seen in their existing successful Site-based Housing First programs. Site-based Housing First programs in Maine will help us to end long-term, chronic homelessness in our state and can be effective in both rural and urban communities to help the most vulnerable Mainers.

We urge you to support this bill's solution to maximize housing stability and prevent returns to homelessness. Everybody, in every community across Maine, deserves housing and the support necessary to maintain it. Please vote Ought to Pass for LD 2.