



**Testimony of Jena Jones on Behalf of
the Maine Council on Aging to the Joint Standing
Committee on Housing**

**In Favor of LD 2 – An Act to Address Maine's
Housing Crisis**

Submitted on April 4, 2023

Greetings, Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and the members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing.

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 2.

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 50.¹ Without services and supports, people who are chronically unhoused experience severe cognitive and physical decline decades earlier than in those who are housed.²

The funding proposed in LD 2 will allow older people who are chronically unhoused to gain more access to stable housing with necessary on-site services. Just as having access to preventative medicine can help manage chronic medical conditions, early and routine access to housing with appropriate services and supports helps people with cognitive and/or behavioral challenges manage daily life and remain active within their communities.

Within the older adult homeless population, many are impacted by aging-associated diseases like sensory loss, cognitive impairment, and an increased likelihood of falls - and the rate of impact is higher than their housed counterparts in the same age group.³ The overall cost of the enormous burden of homelessness ultimately means that assistance must come as quickly as possible as death happens on average 20 years earlier than those with access to stable housing.⁴

¹ (Kushel, 2020)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

In addition to providing secure housing for those in need, LD 2 would ensure older adults are connected to needed services that provide aid and support. The presence of on-site social services will connect folks to programs that can offer access to hearing aids and/or glasses, to adult day programs or courses at a local Area Agency on Aging, or to a primary care physician to manage any chronic medical conditions.

The combination of secure housing and access to services in the building ultimately alleviates the burden of the frequent occurrence of chronically homeless individuals ending up in higher cost institutions like emergency rooms or jails. When patients are frequently spending days in an ER awaiting social services due to a severe and persistent workforce shortage, the costs to health systems soar. The work of LD 2 applies upfront funding to manage a downstream hemorrhage.

There is still work to do to manage the need for secure, affordable housing solutions for older Mainers, but LD 2 takes actionable steps toward helping a vulnerable population and provides a method for reducing healthcare costs and assists in alleviating the workforce shortage burden. I urge you to support LD 2.

Thank you.

Jena Jones