



To: Committee on Housing

From: Ezra Sassaman, Maine Youth for Climate Justice

Date: April 3, 2023

Re: Testimony in favor of LD 2: An Act To Address Maine's Housing Crisis

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and the members of the Committee on Housing, my name is Ezra Sassaman. I am writing as a representative for Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ), a coalition of over 460 youth from across the state who are fighting for bold climate action and a just transition to a livable future in Maine. I am writing in favor of LD 2.

At Maine Youth for Climate Justice, we recognize that the effects of the climate crisis are not distributed to everyone in the same way. When natural disasters happen, the most vulnerable are hit first and with the most devastating effects. With homelessness and natural disasters across the country both on the rise, these crises will worsen each other if not addressed in an effective way.

Site-based Housing First, as proposed in LD 2, is an effective and necessary way to mitigate homeless in Maine and across the country. This evidence-based model includes providing the support for continued housing, which is especially effective for vulnerable populations. When people are trapped in the chaos of homeless, their primary focus is often on basic survival and waiting in lines for a bed or food. Taking care of housing first frees people up towards working towards their independent future – focusing on their health, education, or employment, and building and re-buildign relationships with friends and family.

Both Preble Street and Avesta Housing have used the Housing First model as a successful solution to chronic homelessness. Now it is time to expand this model across the state, in both urban and rural areas.

MYCJ is especially invested in addressing issues that directly impact youth and those with marginalized identities in the state. These are the groups that will be most harmed if we

continue business as normal and do not actively begin to address pressing issues such as homelessness and mitigating the climate crisis.

Prebel Street reported the following statistics about how homelessness affects youth in Maine:¹

- More than 30% of Maine's homeless population is under the age of 24.
- 85% of Maine homeless youth report having had adverse childhood experiences.
- Homeless youth experience higher levels of trafficking, violence, suicide, untreated mental health and substance use disorders and trauma compared to housed peers.
- At one Maine shelter in 2021, 55% of the youth and young adults identified as Black, African American, or Indigenous, compared to 1.9% of Maine's general population.
- LGBTQ+ young people are 120% more likely to experience homelessness than their non-LGBTQ+ peers.

Taking justice in Maine seriously means making sure *everyone* is taken care of. No one deserves to go through the trials and tribulations of homelessness. Failing to act is a tacit endorsement of the status quo – one that is not working for everyone in the state.

For the above reasons, our coalition, Maine Youth for Climate Justice, urges you to vote ought-to-pass on LD 2. Thank you.

¹ Prebel Street, "[10 Things to Know About Youth Homelessness in Maine](#)", *Prebel Street*, November 15, 2022. Accessed April 3, 2023.