

Hello Chair Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Tom Kropf, I am a co-owner of SHIFT—a personal training gym located in the Bayside neighborhood of Portland, near Preble Street. I am writing in support of LD599: An Act to Provide Support Services for a Transitional Housing Program for Homeless Persons.

For the better part of the past year, I have been serving as a member of the advisory board at Elena's Way. During that time, I have witnessed the remarkable work Elena's Way has done and how lives can be transformed by showing compassion and understanding to a community that has been vilified and shunned.

While I fully understand homelessness is a complex and multifaceted issue, shelters such as Elena's Way represent a path forward to help those left vulnerable by systems that exclude them based on their past or present issues; Elena's Way opens a new front in a battle to help these vulnerable people.

Furthermore, as a business owner in the bayside neighborhood, I have seen the ebb and flow of people struggling to eek out an existence based on shelter capacity and how organizations like Preble Street work selflessly to help. I see how poorly the unhomed are treated by other people in the community. I've walked past bodies in the street who have died from exposure without a mention in the local press while the location of food trucks makes front page news. Preble Street and Elena's Way are beacons of good and hope for these unfortunate few. Any funding directed to Preble Street is money well spent.

Thank you for your time.