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February 10, 2025

Re: LD 244 An Act to Provide Safe, Short-term Housing to Indigent Individuals Recently Released from Correctional Facilities

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM. CHOM's small staff works collaboratively with service providers across Maine to house hundreds of people experiencing homelessness, particularly people with chronic homelessness, victims of domestic violence, and homeless Veterans – all of whom require supportive housing, including recovery residences.

I am testifying in strong support of LD 244 An Act to Provide Safe, Short-term Housing to Indigent Individuals Recently Released from Correctional Facilities. *This bill directs the Department of Corrections to administer a program to provide transitional housing to recently released indigent clients of the Department of Corrections and establishes a fund to fund the program. This bill also directs the Maine State Housing Authority to study long-term solutions for transitional housing for recently released indigent clients of the Department of Corrections.*

I chair the ESAC FUSE (Frequent Users System Engagement) Committee, an initiative in Portland that has been working on a by-name list effort to house people who are chronically homeless, people who are unsheltered, people who are frequent users of emergency systems – people in need of permanent supportive housing interventions. The group of 20 organizations has now housed 518 people, and with success rates between 85 and 95% throughout its 10-year effort. A high percentage of the people served have had frequent interactions with the criminal justice system (including forensic hospitalization).

This Committee has collected and analyzed jail and hospital utilization data for people who were unhoused versus people who had been housed through the initiative. As of the end of December 2024, out of the 438 people housed and still alive, 1 person was in jail and 3 people were in the hospital. In contrast, out of the 160 people unhoused there were 16 people in jail and 7 people in the hospital (primarily forensic hospitalizations). This means that in December, people with long histories of homelessness were more than 43 times more likely to be in jail and more than 6 times more likely to be in the hospital when unhoused than when housed. Throughout the 46 months this data has been collected and analyzed, people with long histories of homelessness were up to 57 times more likely to be in jail when unhoused than when housed (peak: February 2023) and up to 29 times more likely to be hospitalized when unhoused than housed (peak: October 2022). This data is indicative of the difference that housing makes for this population.

Housing stops this population from ricocheting through our most expensive emergency systems, including redundantly entering the criminal justice system (including forensic hospitalizations). Transitional housing for this population makes sense because when given a substantial period of stability, people tend to cease this ricochet pattern.

Please pass LD 244 so that Maine's population of people experiencing homelessness who frequently interact with the criminal justice system have a direct pathway to housing upon release, and as such a clear pathway to success and stabilization. Maine will be better for this.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.