

Testimony in support of LD 244
the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
February 10, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Sarah Johnson and I am a resident of Sanford.

I am writing in support of LD 244, An Act to Provide Safe, Short-term Housing to Indigent Individuals Recently Released from Correctional Facilities.

We have overwhelming data on the importance of safe and stable housing in the rehabilitative and reentry processes. There are numerous studies and reports to cite, for example:

A Prison Policy Initiative briefing that examined over 50 studies and reports states “housing gives people the space and stability necessary to receive care, escape crises, and improve their quality of life. For this reason, giving people housing can help interrupt a major pathway to prison created by the criminalization of mental illness, substance use disorder, and homelessness. “

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2023/09/11/housing-first/>

Wilson Center for Science and Justice at Duke Law studied the cyclical relationship between housing instability and the criminal legal system, whereby a person’s experience with either housing instability or interactions with the criminal legal system can increase the risk and impact of that person experiencing the other.

<https://wcsj.law.duke.edu/news/improving-housing-access/>

Sage Publishing cites various studies that investigated the effect of housing interventions on reducing recidivism in violent crime. They found indications of a positive effect on reducing recidivism in violent crime. Direct transfers to private residential addresses after release from prison resulted in revocation rates of 25% compared to 45% of participants released in emergency shelters

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00111287231180125>

To me that is simply common sense, as I think about how chaotic my life would be without stable housing. I have a group of friends who are adult women ranging in age from 27 to 67 who have all re-entered their community in the last 2 years (in another state). They are some of my former students, and they are women I constantly admire. They are working, going to school, caring for children and / or parents, volunteering at AA or churches or outreach programs, and they have a 0% recidivism rate. These women are intelligent, empathic, supportive of each other, and they each faced

and handled the serious challenges of reentry. Each woman would tell you the most tangible component contributing to their stability on release was safe and secure housing. This was a challenge for some, but a goal we had discussed at length, in relation to overall success. Unstable housing blocks the ability to work on any other aspect of family and community reintegration, to secure and maintain employment and to seek consistent medical and behavioral health services. Lack of housing lowers self esteem, inhibits decision making, increases stress, adversely affects health and impedes building back personal and family relationships. I would hope our collective goal would be for Maine to lead the nation with the lowest recidivism rate of any state. We should do everything possible to support our re-entering neighbors, including housing support.

The Mission of the Maine Department of Corrections is “Making our Communities Safer by Reducing Harm through Supportive Intervention, Empowering Change, and Restoring Lives”. The transitional housing program and transitional housing fund will help the DOC succeed in its mission.

Please support this bill. Dirigo.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Johnson
Sanford, Maine.