

**TESTIMONY OF SUSANNA RICHER**  
**IN SUPPORT OF**  
**L.D. 244 " An Act to Provide Safe, Short-term Housing to Indigent Individuals Recently Released from Correctional Facilities"**  
**Committee On Criminal Justice and Public Safety**  
**February 10, 2025**

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

Thank you for considering my testimony in support of L.D. 244 " An Act to Provide Safe, Short-term Housing to Indigent Individuals Recently Released from Correctional Facilities".

My name is Susanna Richer. I am a resident of Portland ME.

I volunteer with several groups that provide outreach support for the unhoused community in my city. Through that experience I've witnessed the impossible challenges that someone who is unhoused, arrested, and released from a correctional facility faces. To survive, those who truly wish to change their lives for the better are forced back into old patterns because they're given no other option.

This gap in the system puts everyone involved in danger and is expensive, more expensive than providing interim housing and support services.

Through my volunteer work I've become friends with an unhoused disabled man named Andrew. Andrew is in his late 40s, holds an advanced degree in computer science and founded his own tech company worth over \$10 million. A tragic car accident left Andrew severely disabled. A subsequent cancer diagnosis and a dependence on opioids resulted in him losing everything.

Andrew recently spent five months at the Cumberland County jail for possession. While incarcerated, an incredible amount of tax dollars was invested to house Andrew and to put him through treatment. During that time Andrew expressed excitement over the possibilities of rejoining the workforce, reuniting with his family, and turning over a new leaf to life. Unfortunately, there was no plan in place for his release. There was no housing, there was no treatment plan, there wasn't even a plan to pick him up from the jail and bring him somewhere. He was released on a Saturday when no services were available to him.

Because Andrew's Maine Care was turned off when he was incarcerated, he lost connection with his caseworkers. Efforts to connect with sober living facilities proved fruitless as they either didn't have room, would not accept somebody who required medically assisted recovery treatment or would not accept someone without active health insurance.

A little over three weeks ago, I picked Andrew up at the Cumberland County jail. It was 9° outside. Andrew was released in the clothes that he arrived in... a dirty T-shirt and shorts.

Because of his disabilities, Andrew requires a walker. He was released without one.

While I brought Andrew the supplies that he needed to stay warm and mobile, the reality was we had no idea where he was going to go. Thankfully, we were able to reserve one of the last beds at the Homeless Services Center in Portland. Unfortunately, Andrew was assaulted on his first night there. Being disabled he's an easy target. For his own safety, he left the shelter the next day, with nowhere to go.

I tried to find a crisis unit for him to go to until a better plan was created, but all the beds were full.

**I have not seen Andrew in 10 days. When I saw the news this morning that two bodies were found in the woods behind Hannaford's near the shelter in Portland, my first thought was "I wonder if that's Andrew?"**

**If Andrew had access to safe short-term housing and support services upon his release, I feel confident that he would be well on his way to becoming a contributing member of society and to starting a better life. Instead, I'm looking for him on the street, on the jail website, in the hospitals and even wondering if he is dead in the woods somewhere.**

Please pass this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Susanna richer  
Portland ME