



Testimony of

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Before

Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Neither for Nor Against

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

Senator Beebee-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, I am Erik Jorgensen, Senior Director of Government Relations and Communications at the Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing) and I am submitting this testimony neither for nor against LD 244 **An Act to Provide Safe, Short-term Housing to Indigent Individuals Recently Released from Correctional Facilities**

MaineHousing has been helping Maine people own, rent, repair, and heat their homes since 1969. We are an independent state authority (not a state agency) created to address the problems of unsafe, unsuitable, overcrowded, and unaffordable housing. We are authorized to issue bonds to finance single family mortgages for first time homebuyers and for affordable multi-family housing.

We are also authorized to administer a number of state and federal programs, including rental subsidies, weatherization, fuel assistance, two housing block grants, the low-income housing tax credit program, and homeless grant programs. We receive state general fund revenue for homeless programs and receive a dedicated portion of the real estate transfer tax for the Housing Opportunities for Maine (HOME) Fund.

MaineHousing recognizes the importance of the issue that this bill is intended to solve, and the true difficulty of housing a population recently released from the correctional system. We are not, however, direct housing providers, and we neither own nor manage any housing units. As the state's affordable housing finance agency, we provide loans and other financial resources to create housing projects – these are owned and developed by other entities, from public housing authorities to for-profit and non-profit developers. If this bill were to establish a development program aimed at creating housing for this population, we could administer such a program, but it would be contingent on finding willing developers and appropriate locations for these residences. Further, because the population served is indigent, there would also likely need to be some sort of ongoing funding to pay the difference between the residents' rent and the cost of actually managing the properties. Finally, it's important to note that in an era where there is often serious community opposition to any new housing projects, developing new facilities to serve this population is going to be difficult, unless they were located on property already owned by the DOC.

Housing any special-needs population is work that requires support services in order to be successful. Although we are not entirely familiar with the details, the “Leading the Way” and “Waypoint” programs operated by the DOC seem like excellent models for this form of transitional housing.

With regard to the report described in Section 2 of the bill, while we would be happy to help as needed, this proposal is outside of our expertise. It appears to us to be more of a corrections program with a housing element, than a housing program with a corrections element (which is how it is presented here). We would suggest that such a report might better be created within state government, as a legislative study, or by the Department of Corrections. We would be willing to provide any technical assistance needed on the housing aspects of such a report.

I am sorry I was unable to attend the initial hearing on this bill, but hope to be present at the work session.

Thank you.