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March 18, 2025

Re: LD 641, An Act to Support Diversion Efforts to Address Homelessness in Maine

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM. CHOM creates housing and inclusive communities for vulnerable populations in Maine.

I am testifying in strong support of LD 641, An Act to Support Diversion Efforts to Address Homelessness in Maine. *This bill provides one-time funds in fiscal year 2025-26 and fiscal year 2026-27 only for the Housing Problem Solving Program ( \$750,000 in each year of the biennium).*

The Housing Problem Solving Program, the diversion program funded through MaineHousing, has delivered significant positive outcomes in addressing housing instability and preventing homelessness. However, this effective program lacks adequate funding to meet great needs throughout the entire state.

This bill would double the funding for the Housing Problem Solving Program, a flexible funding mechanism for housing-related expenses directly supporting individuals and families at risk of homelessness. This would expand the availability and accessibility of housing assistance services across the state.

Maine's homeless shelters are at capacity and many are overflowing – forcing people into to attempt to live outside. Across our homeless system, we continue to have inflow but very little outflow into stable housing. This means our system is stuck.

Stopping the inflow is a critical step to keep our stuck system from getting worse.

Funding diversion programs will thwart inflow, keeping people out of homelessness so they won't become stuck.

Preventing homelessness is far easier and less expensive than addressing it after it happens. Once someone falls into homelessness, it becomes significantly harder to regain stability, and it leads to long-term reliance on shelters and costly emergency interventions.

The State of Connecticut's diversion program has demonstrated remarkable success in reducing homelessness, achieving a 53% decrease in unhoused populations.

Investing in this program is expected to help Maine address homelessness by preventing it.

We have seen that a rather small investment in Maine's Housing Problem Solving Program has paid considerable dividends. It is wise to do more.

It makes sense to keep people from entering an already overburdened system. This bill presents a feasible way to do that.

Please pass LD 641 so that Maine has the resources it needs to end and prevent homelessness.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.