

To Joint Select Committee on Housing by Christopher St.John, Brunswick, cstj@gwi.net

Testimony Regarding LD 641 An Act to Support Diversion Efforts to Address Homelessness in Maine, March 18, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing.

I am a resident of Brunswick and have been a member of the Southern Midcoast Housing Collaborative and the Tedford Housing Capital Campaign committee. I offer these remarks with the benefit of those experiences, but only on my own behalf.

I am grateful for all the work accomplished in each of the last several legislatures, making more progress to invest in housing and shelters than has been done over my lifetime of observing Maine state government. And I know you know how much more there is to be done.

One of the most cost-effective investments that have been made has been to support many organizations, including Tedford Housing in our area, in the combination of activities that are collected under the umbrella terms of homelessness prevention or diversion. These programs demonstrate that relatively small amounts of time and money working intensively with families and individuals at risk of homelessness to stabilize their housing or rapidly rehouse them can save the much greater expenses involved in providing emergency shelter and rehousing people after they have gone through the trauma of being unhoused for any length of time.

Every such program funded by Maine State Housing could use additional funds effectively to keep people housed. I have the experience of seeking affordable housing for a dear one, and know that it can be a dizzying array of programs and options, often with separate application procedures. The plethora of places to look can be daunting even to someone like myself with years of experience helping clients navigate such programs.” Housing navigators” get to know this maze and help clients find their own way to secure affordable housing. A little extra help at the right moment can make all the difference.

These programs will make good use of every dollar that would be appropriated under this bill, and contribute disproportionately to reducing the demand on our inadequate “system” of emergency shelter.