



May 12, 2025

Re: LD 1910

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, my name is Brian Townsend, and I am the Executive Director of Commonspace. Commonspace offers programs for adults and families experiencing challenges related to homelessness, substance use, mental health, trauma, and legal system involvement in Greater Portland and Lincoln and Sagadahoc Counties. Our programs include supportive housing, housing navigation, community recovery centers, jail reentry, emergency food and shelter programs, and harm reduction and recovery programming. Commonspace is deeply engaged with the Coordinated Entry system, and is an active stakeholder within Portland's homeless response system, including holding a position on the Executive Committee of the Emergency Shelter Assessment and Response Team.

I am testifying in strong support of LD 1910, An Act to Strengthen Housing Stability Services by Increasing Support and Outreach, which will require the Department of Health and Human Services to contract with community-based nonprofit organizations to support the deployment of nine outreach case workers and nine housing stability workers statewide. This resource will provide housing and supportive services to individuals who are unhoused and chronically homeless, while simultaneously securing safe indoor environments for outreached individuals who are awaiting permanent housing. LD 1910 stipulates that this resource be distributed thoughtfully around the State, supporting all regions that have a need for these services while targeting areas with higher populations of individuals who are homeless. The bill requires ongoing appropriations of \$800,000 each year for outreach case workers and \$900,000 each year for housing stability workers.

As the only organization in the Portland area that provides a high-volume, low barrier day space designed to support individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness, as well as an organization with both an active HOME Services team and Rapid Rehousing team, Commonspace has significant data and experience to weigh in on the value of this proposed resource, and to offer the **strongest possible support for the passage of LD 1910**. The resources created for Maine's communities and for our currently unsheltered community members by this legislation are right-sized and thoughtfully developed, and carry the promise of

playing an essential role in addressing, and resolving, the surge in unsheltered homelessness across the state.

This legislation would create local efforts that would target individuals with the most intractable histories of homelessness and the most significant barriers to housing, with the immediate goal of benefitting the individuals and their communities by bringing outreached clients indoors and out of unsafe outdoor living conditions, and the intersecting goal of helping these same individuals secure and sustain safe, suitable housing. It is difficult to understate how desperately our communities need this level of support. Efforts to address homelessness at the community level are challenged by many variables. But today, higher density areas such as Portland, Bangor, and Augusta are seeing and sustaining progress in finding housing for individuals who enter the shelter system. At the same time, the most vulnerable among our unhoused neighbors are living outdoors, a reality that makes housing placements exponentially more challenging. Community organizations simply do not have the resources, currently, to provide the level of outreach commitment needed to meet this challenge.

It seems clear to me, as it does to the partners of Commonsplace in Greater Portland and to our partners in this work across the state, that this modest investment would result in a desperately needed positive return, for our communities and for the people who are currently beyond the reach of our shelter and housing support systems. This level of contribution from the State would truly be a game-changer and would provide us with an opportunity to effectively address an issue that is challenging systems and communities across the country. LD 1910 provides an essential component of a blueprint for success that would make Maine a model for we are thoughtfully and impactfully addressing unsheltered homelessness in our state.

Sincerely,

Brian Townsend

Brian Townsend, Executive Director

Commonspace