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**THE MAINE SENATE**  
131st Legislature

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**Testimony in Support of LD 2**  
***An Act to End Chronic Homelessness by Creating the Housing First Fund***

**Presented to the Joint Select Committee on Housing**  
Tuesday, April 4, 2023

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, my name is Troy Jackson. I serve as President of the Maine Senate and proudly represent Aroostook County in the Legislature. I am here today to testify in support of LD 2, "An Act to End Chronic Homelessness by Creating the Housing First Fund." I want to thank House Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross for bringing this bill forward.

Maine is in the midst of a housing crisis. The lack of housing, let alone affordable housing, is holding back working families, small businesses and communities in both rural and non-rural areas. The situation is dire and worsening daily. The most glaring example of this is the growing number of unhoused Mainers all across the state. It's a problem that available shelters and transitional housing can't fix alone.

The proposal before the Housing Committee today would address issues around emergency housing through the Housing First Fund — a model that I believe this Committee is familiar with. It's a model that targets access to housing for chronically unhoused populations, including those with substance use disorder or behavioral health needs. These are vulnerable populations whose health conditions can serve as a barrier to quality, affordable and stable housing.

The Housing First Fund will support the construction of dedicated apartment buildings financed in part by the real estate transfer tax and/or other public or private sources. The program will connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without burdening them with preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, behavioral health treatment, or other service participation requirements. Rather the Housing First Program will supply 24-hour supportive services through the Department of Health and Human Services in order to assure housing stability and reduce the risk of future homelessness.

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What is most compelling about this model is its track record of success. There are three site-based “Housing First” programs operating in Maine – Logan Place, Florence House and Huston Commons.<sup>1</sup> When the first site – Logan Place – opened in 2005, the impact was almost immediate. This 30-unit apartment project led to a 10 percent decrease in homelessness in Portland and a 5 percent decrease statewide.<sup>2</sup> States like Utah have adopted this approach throughout the entire state and have seen a dramatic decline in homelessness – up to 90 percent.<sup>3</sup>

The bottom line is that this program will reduce the number of Mainers staying in shelters or on the streets and save money. Other benefits include fewer emergency room visits, medical transports, police calls, and jail stays. The Community Preventive Services Task Force, an independent panel of public health and prevention experts reviewed 26 studies and found that for every dollar invested in Housing First there was a \$1.44 cost in savings.<sup>4</sup> This societal cost savings came from healthcare, emergency housing, judicial services, welfare and disability costs, and benefits from increased employment.<sup>5</sup>

In closing, Housing First is a win-win. It is a proven program that addresses the homelessness crisis and perpetuates stable housing.

I want to thank Speaker Talbot Ross for bringing this bill forward, and thank all of you for your time and consideration. I hope you will join me in supporting this proposal. Though this is not my area of expertise, I’d be happy to answer any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.prebblestreet.org/2023/02/15/maine-needs-more-site-based-housing-first/>

<sup>2</sup> [www.prebblestreet.org/2023/02/15/maine-needs-more-site-based-housing-first/](http://www.prebblestreet.org/2023/02/15/maine-needs-more-site-based-housing-first/)

<sup>3</sup> [www.mainepublic.org/politics/2023-03-24/utah-official-briefs-committee-on-successes-and-challenges-of-housing-first-model](http://www.mainepublic.org/politics/2023-03-24/utah-official-briefs-committee-on-successes-and-challenges-of-housing-first-model)

<sup>4</sup> [nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Housing-First-Research.pdf](http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Housing-First-Research.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Housing-First-Research.pdf](http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Housing-First-Research.pdf)