



Testimony of Jason Bird

to the Joint Standing Committee on Housing

In Support of LD 2, *An Act To Address Maine's Housing Crisis*

April 4, 2023

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing, my name is Jason Bird. I am the Housing Development Director for Penquis, the community action program (CAP) serving Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Knox Counties. I am also a Board member of the Maine Affordable Housing Coalition (MAHC) and the Bangor Area Homeless Shelter (BAHS). I am testifying today on behalf of Penquis.

The CAP's mission is to eliminate and alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty by assisting low-income individuals to move toward self-sufficiency. Each year we serve more than 25,000 Maine residents providing a variety of services, including Head Start and child care, housing assistance, transportation services, home heating assistance, home repair and weatherization. We partner with the MaineHousing (MSHA) in the delivery of both the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) and Weatherization.

Penquis develops and manages a variety of affordable housing units throughout our service area of Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Knox Counties. These include housing for older adults and workforce housing for families.

Homelessness is a complex and multi-faceted problem that affects individuals from all walks of life. It can be caused by a range of factors, including poverty, mental illness, substance abuse, and systemic inequality. Whatever the cause, homelessness is a serious issue that requires a comprehensive and coordinated response from all levels of government as well as local non-profit and faith-based organizations.

LD 2 is a thoughtful, broad-based approach to meeting the needs of Mainers experiencing homelessness. Housing First is a proven approach that recognizes that housing is a fundamental human right and that without it, individuals simply cannot address the underlying issues that caused their homelessness to begin with. This approach has been shown to be highly effective, with studies consistently finding that Housing First programs result in better outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness, including increased housing stability, improved health, and reduced use of costly emergency services.

262 Harlow Street	(207) 973-3500
PO Box 1162	Fax (207) 973-3699
Bangor, Maine 04402	TDD (207) 973-3520
www.penquis.org	1-800-215-4942

# PENQUIS

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In addition to its effectiveness, Housing First is also cost-effective. By reducing the use of emergency services and other costly interventions, Housing First programs can save taxpayers money in the long run. This means that investing in Housing First is not only the right thing to do morally, but also makes economic sense.

Penquis is actively working on a Housing First project in Bangor. We have secured the funding to acquire and renovate an existing hotel in the City, allowing us to create 41 new homes for this population in just a few months. However, one challenge that we have not been able to overcome is how to fully fund the necessary services that will allow the residents to thrive in their new home. LD 2 will round out the funding needed to provide consistent supportive services so that the residents can regain their life and overcome the challenges they face.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jason Bird

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