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United Way
of Southern Maine



Senator Pierce and Representative Gere, and honorable members of the Joint Housing Committee: my name is Alison Lovejoy and I am here today representing Preble Street to testify in favor of LD 2.

This legislation offers an unparalleled opportunity to make a real impact on chronic homelessness across Maine, and Preble Street Executive Director Mark Swann, a passionate advocate for Site-based Housing First for more than two decades would have LOVED to be here to testify in favor of this critical legislation, but is, unfortunately, ill.

In my former role as the Senior Director of Residential Services, I had direct oversight of Preble Street's three Site-Based Housing First programs: Logan Place, Huston Commons, and Florence House and I have seen the profound impact these programs have on the lives of people with chronic homelessness and complex needs – safety, hope, and the stability of coming home for good.

The hallmark of Site-Based Housing First is professional social work staff on site 24 hours a day providing support services, harm reduction, and crisis intervention to chronically homeless individuals to maximize housing stability and prevent returns to homelessness. I say crisis intervention, but more often than not, the constant presence of supportive staff on site PREVENTS challenges from escalating to the point where they require a crisis or emergency response.

Site-Based Housing First targets individuals with complex needs who have been chronically homeless – so, homeless time and time again, or for years, decades even and is **the most successful and cost-effective way to end homelessness for this group of people**. The individuals served by these programs have complex needs: untreated mental health, substance use, and complex trauma. When living on the streets this leads to frequent interactions with emergency services – including police, emergency rooms, etc., that are traumatic for them and costly for the community.

These are people whose need for support is not contained within a Monday-Friday 9-5 schedule.

On the contrary, the most critical work Preble Street Housing Support Staff do is on the 2nd and 3rd shifts:

- In the late afternoon when an abusive partner of a tenant wants to come in, the tenant can count on staff support in maintaining their home as their sanctuary;
- In the evenings when tenants with substance use disorder find human connection and a creative outlet for their pain through art or making a community meal rather than isolating in their apartments and turning to substances;
- In the middle of the night when tenants with chronic insomnia fight anxiety and fear by talking with staff in the lobby.

Site-Based Housing First leads to positive outcomes for tenants and the community. In a study of Logan Place tenants comparing emergency service use while homeless and after being housed in Site-Based Housing First, there was an 81% decrease in police contacts, a 71% decrease in ambulance use, and a 74% decrease in emergency room visits. Instead, tenants connect with needed supports and resources, improving their quality of life and positively impacting the community. ALL current Huston Commons tenants have been connected to a Primary Care Provider. Tenants connect with mental health care providers, substance use treatment including Medication Assisted Treatment, and SSI/SSDI. And tenants reconnect with members of their family from whom they have been separated for years.

Site-Based Housing First is needed across the state of Maine. As you can see in the packet, current tenants in Preble Street's Housing First Programs lived and worked in 41 cities and towns across Maine – from Caribou to Kittery.

To target these services to people for whom they are most effective and appropriate, I would ask the committee to revise the definition of chronic homelessness within the bill to more closely match the federal definition of chronic homelessness.

Site-Based Housing First is harm reduction. It's community. And with more Site-based Housing First programs across Maine, people who are chronically homeless and have complex needs can be successful in their housing and not return to homelessness and to the streets.

Please vote Ought to Pass on LD 2.

Thank you.