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Good day Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing. My name is Cheryl Harkins. I reside in South Portland. I am an Advocate with Homeless Voices for Justice and Homeless Advocacy for All. I am also on the boards of the Statewide Homeless Council and Maine's Continuum of Care. I am here today to request passage of LD2: An Act to Address Maine's Housing Crisis.

Two thirds of the newly homeless are homeless for the first time. Most of these people will be able to self-solve their issues, but unfortunately, not all. There is a section of people, the most vulnerable, who are elderly, disabled, or experiencing co-occurring issues with mental health and substance use who cannot self-solve. These forgotten people are the chronically homeless.

I can share with you that I have approximately seven years of lived experience. I am 100% disabled. I was hiding from an abusive husband who used the legal system through lies to keep my child from me. Even though I was supposed to have visits through the court system I was still denied any contact. I had to literally go years before these matters were straightened out. My mental health suffered. I didn't know anything about getting assistance. I found a counselor but to this day I suffer from complex PTSD from the abuse in my home and the unsettling cruelty that so many people treat the homeless with. You are at one of the most desperate times in your life and you've never felt so alone and unworthy.

The passage of LD2 will be the beginning for many who struggle with untreated mental and behavioral health issues, substance use disorder, and other difficulties. Some individuals struggle with independent housing and traditional shelter environments. Site-based housing first facilities have 24 hours 7 days a week staffing by trained professionals. The work staff can provide crisis intervention to help maximize a person's housing stability and prevent a return to homelessness. The staff is able to develop a bond of trust with the client by providing them with the training and encouragement for a successful transition to becoming and remaining housed. The unhoused person obtains skills and continues to flourish with independent living skills and community-based services that Housing First teams connect them to.

Site-based housing first programs have been proven to be a successful way to address chronic homelessness. I'm asking you today to pass LD2 so the most vulnerable in Maine will be allowed to succeed as well.

Thank you.