



131st Legislature
Joint Select Committee on Housing

*Testimony of Amanda Olson, Executive Director of Augusta Housing Authority on April 4, 2023
in favor of LD 2.*

Good afternoon Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing. My name is Amanda Olson and I am the Executive Director of the Augusta Housing Authority. I am filled with gratitude today as I have the opportunity to stand before you and speak in favor of LD 2.

While there has long been a shortage of housing in Maine, here in Augusta we have watched that shortage grow to crisis levels over the last several years. Many in our community have become homeless due to drastically increasing rents and no fault evictions. In particular, we have seen an increase in highly vulnerable, chronically unhoused individuals who have complex needs and barriers to accessing housing through traditional models. While we often think of chronic homelessness as a Portland problem, I'm here to underscore that this is an issue that merits both attention and well-directed funding here in Augusta and across all parts our state. Many people right here in our capital city need the help and hope offered through LD 2.

For the past several months I have been participating in a working group coordinated by Senator Pouliot, that has discussed how at both the tactical and systemic levels, we can better address needs of those unhoused in Augusta. We have focused on those most vulnerable; chronically homeless, with complex mental health, substance use or other challenges. Site-Based Housing First has been brought up at every meeting as an obvious solution here in Augusta. As a successful developer of affordable housing, Augusta Housing can find a path to construction, but the missing link has been funding for the necessary 24-hour onsite services to support long-term stability and prevention of returns to homelessness.

Last month, thanks to the welcoming spirit of both Preble Street staff and residents, I had the opportunity to join many of you in the room today on a tour Huston Commons, a Site-Based Housing First Program in Portland. I know I am not alone in sharing what a moving experience it was to meet residents there and see first-hand the transformative effect this program model has had. We heard from individuals who in some cases had been homeless for decades share how the 24-hour on-site staff in combination with services provided by outside partners has allowed them to work through the trauma of homelessness, address substance use and find support in health, relationships and financial and employment goals. It is a building overflowing with stories of success that are nothing short of inspirational.

LD 2, if successful, will help provide this same opportunity for individuals all across Maine. I urge you to support this key initiative as part of a larger effort to address Maine's affordable housing crisis. Thank you for your time.