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**Testimony of Commissioner Mike Sauschuck  
IN SUPPORT OF LD 2**

**An Act to End Chronic Homelessness by Creating the Housing First Fund**

Senator Pierce, Rep. Gere, and distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing, my name is Mike Sauschuck, and I am the Commissioner for the Department of Public Safety. I am here today to testify on behalf of the Department of Public Safety in full Support of LD 2.

This bill establishes the Housing First Program within the Department of Health and Human Services to facilitate the delivery of stabilization and support services to residents of properties established or developed to provide permanent housing to persons who have been chronically homeless and to fund technical assistance, administered by the Maine State Housing Authority, for the development of housing consistent with the program.

Like all of you, we tend to wear many hats throughout our day and for this conversation I'll be leaning heavily on my 22 years with the Portland Police Department. I was honored to be the Chief of that outstanding agency for the last seven years of my career with a brief stint as an Interim City Manager and after retirement a 6-month position as an Assistant City Manager. One of my primary projects during my last position was the relocation of the city's Oxford Street Shelter which occurred after my departure.

It's safe to say that my professional opinion has evolved since the opening of the city's first Housing First development, Logan Place, in 2005. I'll freely admit that as a new Patrol Sergeant I was uninformed but leery about a program that proposed to put 30 of our "super utilizers" or consumers that had frequent contact with the criminal justice, behavioral health, and shelter systems, under one roof. My mistake was focusing solely on the housing component, which in and of itself would have had great value, and not on the critical supports, often in the form of intense casework and connections to community resources, necessary to maintain housing.

Those supports were imperative to the success of Logan Place, Florence House and ultimately Huston Commons. All three of those programs were developed by true empowerment champions in the form of Avesta Housing and Preble Street. It's a privilege to be testifying with these friends, partners, and allies in support of this life saving Housing First fund today.

I would be remiss in not openly stating that programs focused on the chronically homeless population suffering from behavioral health issues will have bumps in the road periodically as new tenants move into the program and new residents move into the neighborhood however these minor issues are all surmountable with ongoing communication and the onsite 24/7 supportive resources that this fund will provide.

One prime example of how this style program can act as the often talked about but seldom realized win/win situation involves a male and a female that fell under the “chronically homeless” definition as defined by this bill. I won’t go into great detail here but one of the Behavioral Health Liaisons in Portland did some research and thought it would be powerful for you to hear. These two individuals were involved with hundreds of police related calls, to include DIPs, layouts, fights, criminal trespasses from dozens of places around the city in the five years before their placement in a housing first building. In the five years since being housed they have been involved in zero calls for service. Sadly, the gentleman recently passed away, but he did it in a loving and safe atmosphere he called home.

The short version of my testimony should have been that Housing First programs with the supportive and stabilization services provided by this fund are national best practices that currently work in the City of Portland and are scalable to succeed anywhere across our great state. These programs are viewed locally as bastions of hope and not hot spots of crime. They serve as success stories where some of our most vulnerable are given the hand up they need to move beyond a survival-based existence focused on the next bathroom break, meal, or long cold night to live healthier, happier, and more productive lives.

For these reasons, I’m in **Full Support of LD 2 “An Act to End Chronic Homelessness by Creating the Housing First Fund”** and I ask that you take this opportunity to support this important public safety initiative today.

I thank you for your time and would be happy to try to answer any questions that you might have.