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Testimony of Deputy Commissioner Bethany Hamm
Maine Department of Health and Human Services

In Support of LD 2
An Act to End Chronic Homelessness by Creating the Housing First Fund

Sponsor: Speaker Talbot Ross
April 4, 2023

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and Members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing:

My name is Bethany Hamm, and I serve as a Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Thank you for the opportunity to provide our testimony on LD 2, and the amendment that would create the Housing First Fund and establish a Housing First Program in Maine.

The amendment to LD 2 would establish a program that pairs safe, stable housing access with the services, and supports necessary to live safe, healthy, and prosperous lives. This would be accomplished jointly by Maine State Housing Authority and the Department of Health and Human Services to serve our friends, family, and community members experiencing chronic homelessness and other barriers to stability in their lives.

As Governor Mills stated during the State of the Budget address, we support developing a Housing First program. The COVID-19 pandemic shined a glaring light on the housing need in Maine. While the federal government, our state agencies, community partners, advocates, and municipalities sprang to action to fill the gaps to the best of our collective ability, we know now more than ever that a permanent, holistic solution to chronic homelessness is critical.

This work further leverages a relatively new initiative within MaineCare, Maine's Medicaid program. The HOME Program is a new, Health Home service model under Section 91 that provides whole-person comprehensive case management, team-based care coordination, supports, and health promotion, and person-centered plans of care with comprehensive transitional care and follow up. Matching up these and other needed services with Housing developments will provide a long-term solution for those in chronic homelessness.

DHHS has been engaged in conversations with the Speaker's Office and other committed Legislators, the Maine State Housing Authority, and the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future about how to best bring this program to life. Ahead of the work session, we expect to have recommendations for the Committee and we appreciate your partnership in this work.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on LD 2. The Department of Health and Human Services looks forward to continuing work with the Speaker, advocates, and our sister agencies toward a Housing First program that can be implemented efficiently and effectively and meet its full potential for Maine people. I am happy to take questions and we will gladly participate at the work session.