



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Representative Michael Brennan introducing
**LD 599, An Act to Provide Support Services for a Transitional Housing
Program for Homeless Persons**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Michael Brennan, and I represent House District 115, which includes a portion of Portland. I am here to introduce **LD 599, An Act to Provide Support Services for a Transitional Housing Program for Homeless Persons** for your consideration.

Last Friday, I toured the recently-opened facility in Portland called Elena's Way. The facility has been operational since last fall and serves up to 40 people who are chronically homeless. The program is the first of its type in the state and will serve as a pilot project for the entire state. Unlike other shelters, Elena's Way provides a more home-like environment, regular access to food and beds in a trauma-informed space with sleeping areas for men, women and couples, and a comprehensive array of services including intensive case management and MaineCare Section 17 Community Rehabilitation Services. All of the residents had been living outside unsheltered or in tents prior to their stay here. The uniqueness of Elena's Way is that it targets people who are restricted from or unable to access other conventional shelters and that these individuals have complex medical needs, histories of trauma, untreated substance use and/or severe and persistent behavioral health issues.

In 1987, Preble Street opened its first emergency shelter in the basement of a church. I toured that facility and it was simply two rows of cots on a concrete floor. One blanket was at the foot of each cot. Since 1987, we have learned a great deal more about how to support people who struggle with major physical and mental health issues.

More specifically, the bill calls for \$1.2 million a year in funding for the necessary staffing and support services required at Elena's Way. With the appropriate support and care, many of the residents will be able to transition to anticipated "Housing First" initiatives.

At the end of my visit to Elena's Way, I was standing outside speaking with a staff person when a man in his 50s put on a pair of pants over the pair he was already wearing. He then put on

another coat over the one he was wearing. The staff person told me he was preparing to spend the night outside because Elena's Way was full. Let's give him a place to stay.

I hope you will give full consideration to this legislation.