



Jill C. Duson  
Senator, District 27

THE MAINE SENATE  
131st Legislature

3 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony of Senator Jill Duson introducing LD 1721, “An Act to Create Transitional Housing Communities for Homeless Populations in the State”  
Before the Joint Select Committee on Housing  
May 12, 2023

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and Distinguished Colleagues on the Joint Select Committee on Housing, my name is Jill Duson. I represent Senate District 27, which includes parts of Westbrook and Portland. I am here to speak in favor of LD 1721, “An Act to Create Transitional Housing Communities for Homeless Populations in the State.”

This legislation proposes two solutions that I believe can become the foundation for a better statewide approach to providing transitional housing for everyone who needs our help.

First, my bill directs MaineHousing to establish a new program with the goal of creating transitional housing communities statewide that are stable, cost effective, and connected to all necessary services and supports. Overall, the bill seeks to create 400 dwelling units of transitional housing for families and 500 units for single individuals, with at least one transitional housing community for each population within each of the 9 homeless response service hubs already established by MaineHousing. This legislation details a broad, flexible approach to this new program that includes non-lapsing funding and the authority to innovate in the construction, renovation, or acquisition of transitional housing units. The program would also set clear parameters surrounding the quality and configuration of transitional housing units. These are not temporary shelter spaces – we aim to establish a lasting infrastructure of transitional housing that will serve Maine for decades to come.

Maine has no statewide transitional housing plan. This bill seeks to begin the process of creating a transitional housing plan for Maine that is humane, effective, efficient, and durable. Currently, as we all know, unhoused people rely on municipal General Assistance, along with associated nonprofit organizations and volunteer networks, to find transitional housing and shelter. But local assistance is under-resourced. Networks and organizations are under tremendous stress. Our current approach is insufficient to meet increasing demand. Stop-gap measures like using hotels for transitional housing have proven extremely expensive, and problematic for some host communities. With the end of federal pandemic funding, we are facing a crisis that demands new solutions.

Second, this legislation would allocate ongoing funding for support services associated with transitional housing. Section 2 of LD 1721 directs the Department of Health and Human Services to coordinate, arrange, or provide assisted housing services to residents at transitional housing



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facilities including services for health, financial literacy, housing navigation, language learning, legal support, transportation assistance, job training, and community connections. These services are essential to successful transitional housing efforts, and I believe there are models of state, regional, and local networks for service delivery that we can use as this program is designed and implemented.

The aim of LD 1721 is to begin a discussion with this Committee, the Legislature, and the Administration. It is important that we start the process of designing a better statewide system to create and manage transitional housing. I have every confidence that this Committee will transform LD 1721 into something better – and I am ready to do whatever I can to assist you as you work on this important opportunity to improve Maine’s ability to serve the unhoused.

I worked closely with the Greater Portland Council of Governments and municipal colleagues to develop this legislative proposal. Policy staff and members of GPCOG are here to testify in support of LD 1721, to respond to your detailed questions, and to provide additional information the Committee may require.

I urge your consideration of this proposal and I would happy respond as best I can to any questions.