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February 23, 2024

Re: LD 2214, An Act Making Unified Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM. CHOM houses Maine's most vulnerable people and advocates on their behalf. I am a member of the Statewide Homeless Council and also chair the Maine Homeless Policy Committee and the Maine Continuum of Care Board of Directors.

I am testifying in strong support of Parts GG and HH of the Supplemental Budget (LD 2214, An Act Making Unified Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025).

Part GG Transfers \$10,000,000 from the unappropriated surplus of the General Fund to the Maine State Housing Authority for new housing units through the Affordable Homeownership program.

Part HH allocates \$16 million in one-time funding for the Emergency Housing Relief Fund to supplement or establish programs addressing the needs of people experiencing homelessness or facing other immediate housing needs, and support other uses that address housing emergencies in the State, such as through privately-operated low barrier shelter, winter warming shelters, legal services, and other wraparound settlement supports intended to help individuals integrate into Maine's workforce and communities to ensure that winter warming shelters, lower barrier shelters, longer term shelters and transitional housing programs can remain open, operating, and supporting the emergency housing needs of Maine people.

Comments on Part GG:

First, I want to thank these Committees and the Legislature for the historic investments made in housing over the last four years. Despite these investments, Maine's housing crisis persists. I urge the Committees to support Part GG and include an additional \$20 million affordable housing allocation to MaineHousing to be split between the LIHTC and the Rural Affordable Rental Housing programs to help address the housing crisis.

There is an extraordinary unmet demand for affordable, quality housing for all populations. The need far exceeds the supply, especially for people with the lowest incomes. Part GG combined with an additional \$20 million allocation to the LIHTC and the Rural Affordable Rental Housing programs would greatly assist in addressing this critical need. This would be a one-time investment, with long-term benefits for Maine.

Comments on Part HH:

Emergency shelters depend upon a variety of funding streams, which even when combined do not cover the cost of providing shelter.

Shelters haven't had enough resources to maintain sufficient capacity and staffing to meet the need for years – and the pandemic worsened this crisis. For Maine to safely meet the needs of everyone experiencing homelessness, we must have a robust, adequately funded shelter system – it is the foundation of our homeless service system.

Shelters in Maine have been full, operating overflow shelters, and/or forced to turn people away due to insurmountable capacity issues for years. Low-barrier shelters in Maine have a combined



almost \$4M deficit. Without adequate funding allocations, emergency shelters in Maine will close – some imminently.

We need all of Maine's 39 shelters to function, or we will most certainly see an exponential growth in encampments. Having sufficient capacity allows the focus to shift to having everyone inside, housing people, and keeping them housed.

Emergency shelters, including low-barrier shelters, are successful in helping people access housing, especially permanent supportive housing (PSH), a proven model for people with the most complex issues underlying their homelessness. It is extremely challenging to house this population when they are outside trying to survive. Emergency shelters provide a foundation from which people with even the most acute mental health needs, substance use disorders, and other vulnerabilities can launch and become stably housed.

Part HH of the Supplemental Budget will allow all of Maine's shelters to remain open in the short term. I would encourage the Committees to consider including language from LD 2136 as amended in the Supplemental Budget to offer long-term solutions to ensure emergency shelters have the financial capacity to serve Maine's most vulnerable populations.

I want to note that there is a difference between temporary warming centers and proper overflow run by professional shelters which help people solve their homelessness rather than just keep them warm for one night. Long-term solutions must ensure shelters can adapt their capacity to address emerging needs. Turning people away is how we end up having people attempting to survive outdoors. Flexible capacity is how we meet the ebbs and flows of homelessness.

Maine is experiencing an unsheltered homelessness/encampment crisis. In the January 2023 Point in Time (PIT) there were 290 people unsheltered throughout all of Maine – the highest unsheltered PIT count Maine has ever had. By December 2023, there were 300 people unsheltered in Sanford alone.

The bar should be high enough that everyone has access to housing, and if that is not immediately available, to safe shelter with professional services that lead to housing.

Encampments are not good for people experiencing homelessness nor for any city or town. Access to shelter and housing is.

These Committees and this Legislature have made important investments in housing and ending homelessness – thank you. But the current situation is dire, and an additional injection of resources is vital.

Please support Parts GG and HH of the Supplemental Budget so we can provide Maine with needed resources to address the affordable housing crisis and work together to end and prevent homelessness in Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.