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February 5, 2025

Testimony in Support of:

L.D. 126, "An Act to Expand the Use of the Veterans' Homelessness Prevention Partnership Fund"
Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. I'm David Richmond, Director of the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services and I'm here today to testify in support L.D. 126, "An Act to Expand the Use of the Veterans' Homelessness Prevention and Partnership Fund".

The Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services, Homeless Veterans' Coordination Team leads our Bureau's effort to reduce veterans' homelessness in Maine. They work closely and weekly with other members of the State Homeless Veterans Action Committee (or HVAC) to ensure that each homeless veteran identified by any member organization of the HVAC is sheltered as quickly as possible and is making progress to secure housing. Relevant statute for the Veterans' Homeless Prevention Partnership Fund is 37-B Chapter 7, subsection 513-A. Priorities for the fund are: Identify homeless veterans in the State; Identify and secure temporary or permanent living space for veterans within the veterans' communities; Provide reimbursement to human services-based volunteer organizations that provide transitional housing to homeless veterans; and finally, Conducting annual outreach events (or Homeless Veteran Stand downs), targeted to reach the maximum number of veterans in need, to disseminate information on resources and services available to assist homeless veterans. The recently submitted annual report from the Bureau on progress with the Strategic Plan to End Veterans Homelessness in Maine reports the work of the Bureau and other partners on the HVAC, results from the four Stand downs conducted this year, and lists goals to sustain and improve upon in the upcoming year.

The Veterans' Homelessness Prevention Partnership Fund is a critical resource utilized by the Bureau's Homeless Veterans Coordination (HVC) Team to assist veterans currently experiencing homelessness or to prevent a veteran from becoming homeless. Under current law, the Fund's usage is limited to disbursements made through a program of partnerships with human services-based volunteer organizations. While well-intentioned, this requirement often creates obstacles that hinder our ability to deploy resources quickly and effectively.

LD 126 addresses this issue by removing the requirement for partnerships with specific volunteer organizations, thereby allowing the Director of MBVS to make direct disbursements to

organizations, businesses, landlords, or other entities. This flexibility is essential to meeting the immediate needs of veterans facing housing insecurity.

Simplifying the disbursement process through LD 126 would enable the Bureau's HVC team to respond swiftly to urgent housing needs, such as paying rent arrears or securing temporary shelter for veterans in crisis. By allowing direct payments, this measure reduces administrative burdens, enhances efficiency, and ensures funds are directed where needed most, addressing real-world challenges that jeopardize veterans' housing stability – while operating in accordance with state audit polices and fiscal responsibility.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

David Richmond
Director, Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services