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United Way  
of Southern Maine



Good afternoon, Chair Ingwersen and Chair Meyer, and Committee Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Julie Orrego, and I am the Advocacy Supervisor at Preble Street. Preble Street's mission is to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty, and to advocate for solutions to these problems.

Preble Street strongly supports LD 408, An Act to Allow Unaccompanied and Emancipated Minors to Access Their Vital Records at No Cost. Preble Street's Teen Services program has skilled, professional caseworkers who, each year, help more than 200 homeless youth to meet basic needs such as shelter, food, and safety. One of the most significant challenges these young people face is securing vital records, including birth, death, fetal death, marriage, divorce, and domestic partnership certificates. Unfortunately, without proper identification, homeless youth cannot exercise their rights or access critical services, such as education, healthcare, housing, employment, and other benefits, to escape homelessness and build a stable future.

Due to the nature of these young individuals' unique and tumultuous departures from their former homes, we often find youth presenting without their vital documents. This could be a result of an abrupt removal from their homes such as being kicked out, running away or due to parents or guardians withholding their documents in an effort to maintain power or control. Last summer, our Teen Services staff worked with a youth who encountered this barrier. He was 17 years old and was without identification, despite his connection to his mother. They were both experiencing homelessness and neither one had any vital documents. Our caseworkers were able to assist him with obtaining his vital records so he could be connected to other resources such as SNAP benefits.

By waiving the fees to access vital records, LD 408 removes a financial barrier that disproportionately affects homeless youth, many of whom do not have the means to pay for these necessary documents. This bill recognizes the unique circumstances of homeless youth by allowing requests to be made in person, by mail, by telephone, or through other means. It also allows unaccompanied youth to be identified by service providers already working with them, such as school administrators, shelter directors, and social workers. These trusted professionals are in the best position to verify the

youth's identity and assist them in obtaining the vital records they need, further streamlining the process and ensuring they are not left behind.

In conclusion, Preble Street urges you to pass this bill because it provides a vital step toward ensuring that unaccompanied and emancipated youth can access the records they need to survive and rebuild their lives. If passed, Maine would join 23 other states that have a similar law in place.

Thank you for your time and consideration.