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United Way
of Southern Maine



Good morning, 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 431, An Act Regarding Driver's Licenses for Individuals in Foster Care. Each year, Preble Street's Teen Services program helps nearly 300 homeless youth meet basic needs such as shelter, food, and safety. One of the most common barriers for homeless youth is transportation to school, medical appointments, and jobs. Without reliable transportation, it can be difficult for youths to exercise their rights or access critical services, such as education, healthcare, housing, employment, and other benefits, to escape homelessness and build a stable future.

Caseworkers at our Teen Services program do not have vouchers to help youth cover the \$30 fee for obtaining a driver's license. Additionally, many clients have expressed interest in obtaining their driver's license to find housing closer to their support systems or in areas that would accept their housing vouchers. This bill will cover the fee for obtaining a driver's license and help reduce some of the barriers our youth experience.

Access to state-issued identification can help youth get hired, travel, secure housing, and open bank accounts. By waiving the fees to access driver's licenses, LD 431 removes a financial barrier that disproportionately affects homeless youth, many of whom do not have the means to pay for this. This bill enables service providers, including school administrators, shelter directors, and social workers, to identify unaccompanied and foster youth they work with, which is critical because these trusted professionals are in the best position to verify the youth's identity and assist them in obtaining the necessary documents, further streamlining the process and ensuring they are not left behind.

Preble Street urges you to pass LD 431 because it is crucial to ensure that youth have access to driver's licenses, especially in rural areas. It removes the financial barrier to having reliable transportation, and opens the door for youth to obtain education, employment, housing, and healthcare.

Thank you for your time and consideration.