



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**Testimony of Representative Melanie Sachs in support of
LD 641, An Act to Support Diversion Efforts to Address Homelessness in Maine
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development**

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development:

My name is Melanie Sachs, and I am honored to represent the community of Freeport in the Maine Legislature. I am before you today to express my strong support for **LD 641, *An Act to Support Diversion Efforts to Address Homelessness in Maine***.

Last session, the 131st Legislature made historic investments in almost every level of the housing system in Maine. This included production of new units, help for first-time home buyers, supports for residents of mobile home parks, funding various levels of emergency housing (including low barrier shelters, transitional housing and emergency shelters), support for homeless students, rent relief and of course, the Housing First program.

One area, which did not request additional funding last session, was the Housing Problem Solving (HPS) program. It is clear from the data, however, that additional resources are needed to maximize the benefits of the program and meet the growing need. This evidence-based initiative prevents homelessness before it starts. The funds are granted to the service providers who can identify needs quickly and provide rapid assistance. Allowable expenses include utility assistance, rental application fees, minor repairs to maintain habitability, transportation and moving costs or temporary lodging as part of a safety plan for a domestic violence survivor who is in transit to a safe location. These supports are not covered by any other statewide funding source and are a fraction of the cost of other homelessness intervention programs. Investing in HPS reduces pressure on shelters, public health systems and emergency services — saving the state money in the long run.

I have personal experience with this model. I have been a licensed clinical social worker for almost 30 years. I served for several years as the Executive Director of Freeport Community Services (FCS), and I have seen this type of “just-in-time” support in action. FCS provided and continues to provide many of these areas of targeted support to help prevent homelessness in our community on a much smaller scale with actions such as supplying food, funds for prescriptions,

bus tokens and utility assistance. People living on the edge needed just that small amount of help to be able to keep working, pay an unexpected bill or navigate a change in employment status. This program works to keep people in their homes, keep their kids in their schools and to keep community members in their jobs.

I urge you to support LD 641. Thank you.