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Subject: Support for LD 641, "An Act to Support Diversion Efforts to Address Homelessness in Maine"

To Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and the esteemed members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development, good afternoon. My name is Shelby Wilson, and I am a proud resident of Aroostook County, where I have also had the privilege of working as the Hub 9 Homeless Response Coordinator. Today, I come before you in support of LD 641, "An Act to Support Diversion Efforts to Address Homelessness in Maine," sponsored by Representative Marc Malon. As someone who serves a small, rural community, I believe this bill is not only necessary; it is urgent.

Rural communities like that of Aroostook County, face unique and pressing challenges that make addressing homelessness even more difficult. We experience a shortage of resources and services needed to effectively combat homelessness compared to urban areas. While our homelessness is not always visible, our shelters are limited, outreach services are underfunded and sometimes absent, and many individuals who are at risk of homelessness lack access to the resources they need to regain stability and prevent homeless episodes.

Consistently for the past 5 months in Aroostook County, 70-77 percent of inflow, or individuals coming in contact with the homeless response system, are coming into contact with homeless providers for the first time that we are aware of. 70-77 percent of those experiencing homelessness right now in Aroostook County, could have prevented their episode of homelessness were there the needed funding to provide intervention as LD 641 seeks to do by allocating critical funding to the Housing Problem Solving Program.

It currently takes an average of 418 days in Aroostook county from the moment a person contacts the homeless response system to the moment they are housed. 418 days of emergency services, 418 days of non-profit advocacy, 418 days of police involvement, and 418 days of shelter bed-night costs, 418 days it takes using the conventional methods available to get someone housed. But to keep someone housed, most only require a one-time financial intervention.

We can acknowledge that it is fiscally responsible and best practice to provide monetary intervention rather than continuously paying for the for the average time it takes someone to finally be housed. We can proverbially continue to rescue folks from the river, and we should, but we can also start going upstream to prevent folks from falling in. Thank you.