



Testimony of
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Before
The Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development (132nd)

In opposition to
LD 1328: An Act to Create Housing and Recovery Services for LGBTQIA+ Individuals

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, I am Erik Jorgensen Senior Director of Government Relations and Communications at the Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing) and I am submitting this testimony in respectful opposition to *LD 1328: An Act to Create Housing and Recovery Services for LGBTQIA+ Individuals*.

MaineHousing has been helping Maine people own, rent, repair, and heat their homes since 1969. We are an independent state authority (not a state agency) created to address the problems of unsafe, unsuitable, overcrowded, and unaffordable housing. We are authorized to issue bonds to finance single family mortgages for first time homebuyers and for affordable multi-family housing.

We are also authorized to administer a number of state and federal programs, including rental subsidies, weatherization, fuel assistance, two housing block grants, the low-income housing tax credit program, and homeless grant programs. We receive state general fund revenue for homeless programs and receive a dedicated portion of the real estate transfer tax for the Housing Opportunities for Maine (HOME) Fund.

This bill does have several technical issues that should be considered. First, as a statewide housing finance agency, we are bound to *affirmatively further fair housing* in all of our activities, and this means that we cannot pick a particular protected class around which to develop housing. The bill requires the management of these projects to be “individuals in recovery from substance abuse disorder that identify as LGBTQIA+ and provide services for LGBTQIA+ individuals”. Even though the residents are not required to identify as one of those categories, legislating such requirements for staff (who also live there) is, in our opinion, a potential Fair Housing violation.

There are two other issues that concern us. In seeking to hire a contractor to run these properties, we should point out that MaineHousing has neither the experience nor the expertise to know if the counselling and other recovery and social services being provided are being done at a professional level, or whether they are effective. We would not be qualified to oversee or assess social services. It

is also unclear to us who would own these projects, or how they would be initially acquired. MaineHousing is a financing agency, and we do not own residential properties, and would not be able to own recovery houses. That might not be the intent of the sponsor, but it is not clear to us whether the intent of the bill is to create new recovery housing or simply to operate recovery housing that already exists but to aim it at this population.

We think this bill has many unresolved details, and while our primary concerns are around what we see as a significant fair housing concern, there are other issues with how these facilities would be owned and operated that should be fully addressed in order for a plan like this to move forward.

Thank you.