

## **Testimony in Support of LD 1910, An Act to Strengthen Housing Stability Services by Increasing Support and Outreach**

Good afternoon, Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and the esteemed members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, My name is Jennifer Weatherbee, and I am the **Hub Coordinator representing Hub 7 which covers Penobscot/Piscataquis Counties** within Maine's Homeless Response System. I am here to express my strong support of **LD 1910, An Act to Strengthen Housing Stability Services by Increasing Support and Outreach**.

Maine is facing a severe homelessness crisis. Shelters are overwhelmed, and too many people are living outside with few options. We lack- not only housing- but people working on the ground. Skilled and compassionate workers who can connect members of our communities who are experiencing homelessness to stable housing and walk them through these complex systems to find housing, and to ensure- once they are housed, they are connected to the services and programs, they will need to remain successfully housed.

That's why LD 1910 is so important!! This bill addresses the gap by funding 9 outreach workers/ and 9 housing stability workers across the state. These workers can provide trauma-informed care, crisis intervention, as well as connecting to needed programs and services.

These would be skilled workers who can meet people where they are—on the streets, in encampments, or public spaces—rather than referring them to office-based services that many struggle to access. Many individuals experiencing homelessness feel abandoned or mistreated by transitional systems. We need problem solvers on the ground who are experts in housing, healthcare, and social services.

Early engagement is built on trust and flexibility. This approach removes common barriers such as transportation and appointment scheduling that can prevent many from accessing mainstream services. Once they have built trust, they can start the work using compassionate, trauma informed approaches and can over time transition clients into more structured and mainstream support systems.

I stand here in my current role as the Hub Coordinator of Penobscot/Piscataquis County, but before this- I was an outreach worker. I would like to share a couple of examples of my own experiences, as well as other outreach workers- past and present. These are some of our success stories.

My first example is a chronically homeless client who was minimally known to our system. Due to Mental health and transportation issues, he remained homeless over many years and had difficulty maintaining mainstream services. Outreach providers were able to provide swift support and help this individual get into shelter, set up with a Primary Care Provider, a housing voucher and was ultimately housed. This client was set up with long term Case Management services and continues to be housed to this day.

In a rural Washington County, an outreach worker met a man living in an abandoned trailer with no heat or running water. Through repeated visits, the worker gained trust, helped the individual apply

for General assistance, connected him to behavioral health services, and ultimately placed him in stable housing. With out support that could meet him on the ground, this individual would have remained isolated and at severe risk.

One Veteran was living in a tent for over two years but refused all services and shelter, He reported that he was a veteran, but it was not verified. Over several months the outreach worker-built rapport with this client and built trust. This outreach worker went down every avenue with this client and was able to find his records and supported him with getting benefits, services and eventually stable housing.

These stories are only a few examples of how outreach can provide hands on, on the ground support to those experiencing homelessness. People experiencing homelessness face enormous barriers to accessing traditional services. They need consistent, community-based support. Not support in an office setting with multiple barriers to meet.

I urge this committee to pass LD 1910. It is critical step towards a more effective, humane and stable approach to homelessness in Maine.

Thank you for time