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Testimony Neither for Nor Against:

L.D. 2135, "An Act to Provide Funding to Keep Maine Veterans Housed"

Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. I'm David Richmond, Director of the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services (MBVS) and I'm here today to testify neither for nor against L.D. 2135, "An Act to Provide Funding to Keep Maine Veterans".

LD 2135 proposes a one-time General Fund appropriation to support housing stabilization activities for veterans through Preble Street, including landlord incentives, outreach, and the resolution of past rental debts. The intent of the bill aligns with ongoing statewide and federal efforts to reduce veteran homelessness and maintain access to permanent supportive housing.

The Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services recognizes and values the important work that Preble Street performs in serving homeless veterans in our state. Their organization is a key partner within Maine's broader continuum of care and has contributed meaningfully to efforts to stabilize housing for vulnerable veteran populations.

However, MBVS would like to share several considerations related to the proposed funding structure. As a state agency, any disbursement of General Fund monies, even on a one-time basis, would be subject to state procurement statutes, fiscal policies, and oversight requirements. This would necessitate the establishment of rules, monitoring mechanisms, and accountability structures to ensure appropriate use of state funds. These requirements may limit the flexibility intended by the proposal, particularly for funding designed to incentivize landlords and respond quickly to housing-related needs.

Additionally, while Preble Street is an important partner, it represents one organization within a larger network of service providers working to address veteran homelessness across Maine. Many of these organizations were similarly impacted by the loss of federal funding. Directing state funds to a single provider may raise equity considerations when other organizations are performing comparable work in different regions of the state.

MBVS remains committed to working collaboratively with the Legislature, state agencies, and community partners to explore solutions that are equitable, fiscally responsible, and aligned with state procurement requirements, while continuing to support efforts to prevent and reduce veteran homelessness.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

David Richmond
Director, Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services