

Testimony in Support of LD 2135

An Act to Provide Funding to Keep Maine Veterans Housed

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and distinguished members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee:

My name is David Patch, and I am the President of Maine Veterans in Need, a veteran-led, all volunteer, nonprofit organization whose mission is to assist veterans and their dependents who are in need, advocating for those in active crisis/emergency, preventing homelessness, helping those who are homeless transition into stable housing, and prevent veteran suicide. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in strong support of LD 2135.

I want to be clear from the outset:

This bill is not theoretical to me.

This funding is not abstract.

The problem it addresses is something I see every week, often every day, across Maine.

As President of Maine Veterans in Need, I work directly with homeless veterans, men and women who served our country and are now sleeping in their cars, living in tents in the woods, couch-surfing, or cycling through emergency shelters. Some are elderly. Some are disabled. Some are still working but cannot keep up with Maine's housing costs. Many are reluctant to ask for help at all.

Veteran homelessness in Maine has improved over time, but it has not been solved. Recent Point-in-Time counts continue to identify well over one hundred veterans experiencing homelessness statewide in a single night, and those numbers do not always capture veterans living in vehicles, encampments, or temporarily doubled up, whom my organization regularly encounters. In practice, the need is larger and more persistent than the official counts suggest.

At the same time, Maine faces one of the tightest housing markets in the country. Rents continue to rise faster than fixed incomes, disability compensation, or entry-level wages. Even veterans who qualify for federal housing assistance often struggle to find a landlord willing to accept them, or to secure a unit before a crisis turns into homelessness.

This is where Preble Street's work is essential.

Preble Street is not just a service provider; it is a keystone organization in Maine's veteran homelessness response system. Their veteran housing staff conduct outreach, navigate complex systems, recruit landlords, and provide the practical supports that actually move veterans from homelessness into housing.

Importantly, I can say from direct experience that the grant funding referenced in LD 2135 has worked.

Maine Veterans in Need has personally witnessed the positive impact of Preble Street's prior funding used for veteran housing efforts. Because of that funding:

- Veterans were able to secure apartments that otherwise would not have been available to them.
- Landlords were willing to take a chance on veterans with limited income or prior housing instability.
- Housing placements happened faster, reducing time spent in shelters, vehicles, or encampments.
- Veterans stabilized before their situations deteriorated into medical or mental health emergencies.

This is not just compassionate, it is cost-effective. Every veteran who is housed reduces the burden on emergency rooms, law enforcement, shelters, and crisis services. Housing first and housing stabilization approaches consistently cost far less than allowing homelessness to persist.

Maine Veterans in Need does not replace Preble Street's work, we support and strengthen it. MVN provides peer-based veteran engagement, emergency stabilization, benefits navigation, and coordination across local and regional partners. Veterans often relate more easily to other veterans, and that trust can be the key that opens the door to housing and services. When MVN and Preble Street work together, outcomes improve.

LD 2135 recognizes an essential reality:

Ending veteran homelessness requires a coordinated system, not isolated efforts.

This \$90,000 appropriation is modest in scale but high in impact. It helps replace lost grant funding so that proven strategies, landlord incentives, housing search support, and rapid stabilization, do not disappear at a time when the housing market is already stacked against low-income veterans.

I want to emphasize something important:

The veterans we serve are not asking for luxury. They are asking for safety, dignity, and stability. A door that locks. A place to sleep. A chance to rebuild.

LD 2135 helps make that possible.

As someone who has sat with veterans in their cars in the winter, walked through encampments in the woods, and helped people navigate the system one step at a time, I can say this with confidence: Preble Street's work saves lives, and this funding helps keep that work going.

On behalf of Maine Veterans in Need, and on behalf of the veterans we serve, I respectfully urge the committee to support LD 2135.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your commitment to Maine's veterans. I am happy to answer any questions.