

The Honorable Susan Deschambault, Chair

The Honorable Charlotte Warren, Co-Chairs

Members of the Joint Standing Community on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

DATE: May 14th, 2021

RE: LD 1478 An Act To Decriminalize Homelessness

Good morning Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and distinguished members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business.

My name is Lado Lodoka. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1694 on behalf of the Immigrant Housing Coalition. The Immigrant Housing Coalition is a not for profit organization that supports affordable housing policy through education and advocacy.

LD1478 An Act to Decriminalize Homelessness

Homelessness is a result of failed economic, social, and health policies that were designed to benefit a certain class of citizen. As a result, those who did not fit that mold ended up on the periphery. Affordable housing is acute in Maine. People, who are one paycheck away from losing their homes, have no safety net, especially when hit by an illness or loss of a job. Some of the homelessness population have a history of mental illness disorder or substance abuse. Losing home exacerbates the problem.

Our society has a stigma against homelessness. We have for so long seen homelessness as individual failure, rather than failing public policy. Adopting homelessness crisis protocol, while dealing with a person experiencing homelessness, is the best practice at this time. It will give law enforcement the option to refer the individuals to mental health support services, and substance abuse and case management professionals, working to address the conditions which exacerbate homelessness.

Currently homeless persons are arrested and spend a few days in jail and released until they are arrested again. It becomes a cycle living between the jail and the street, which is costly to the state. LD1678 is the first step to restore human dignity to people experiencing homelessness, open the door for treatment, and restoration of self confidence and employment down the line.

How we as a society treat the weakest among us says more about us than the person experiencing homelessness because of the power imbalance.

I urge the committee to vote ought to pass LD1478 to bring fairness to how we treat our vulnerable population. Thank you.