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Senator Susan Deschambault
Representative Charlotte Warren
Committee on Criminal Justice & Public Safety
100 State House Station, Rm. 436
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: MACDL Testimony in Support of LD 1478: An Act To Decriminalize Homelessness

Dear Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice & Public Safety,

MACDL wholeheartedly supports LD 1478. Thank you to Representative Morales for bringing forth this important bill.

Decriminalization of low-level, victimless crimes that our unhoused clients are charged with time and time and time again could make a huge difference in our clients lives, reinject some humanity and sense into how we treat our fellow human beings, and take the burden off law enforcement and county jails to arrest and house the homeless as their cases wind through the criminal legal system.

Criminal trespass is one crime that our clients face constantly. One of the biggest reasons clients are arrested for this crime is because they have been “trespassed” from local shelters and resource centers and have no other place to go. Disorderly conduct, being loud or fighting, is a great charge to arrest people in the streets and lock them up for the night: that does nothing to help ensure that the incident won’t happen again. People urinate in alleyways and the street because they have no public restrooms available to them. (“Possession of a scheduled drug that is based on using the scheduled drug” is not as clear to me: simple use of a drug—except for people who are on conditions of release or probation—is not a crime to begin with.) “Drinking in public” is used almost exclusively as a tool to arrest and “move along” unhoused people who are drinking alcohol in “public” for the simple reason that they have no “private” place to go.

In Portland, Bangor, and Lewiston in particular, severe policing of these “homeless” crimes has done nothing to improve public safety or connect unhoused people with the services—primarily *housing*—they need to ensure that they get on a better and healthier path.

You want to cure homelessness, keep our neighborhoods safe, quiet, and clean, and improve quality of life for everyone in our community? You don’t keep locking people up. You fix the problems that need fixing. You ensure people have safe homes, warm beds, good shoes, hot meals, and medical care—you provide the stability and support needed to get people on their feet again. Or, you can keep paying police, corrections officers, prosecutors, judges, and yes, even defense attorneys, to continue this macabre dance of despair indefinitely—improving

nothing, spending money, wasting time and wasting lives. Which do you want to support?

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for allowing me to speak with you all today on this important issue. I would be happy to answer the questions of the Committee.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Tina Heather Nadeau". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Tina Heather Nadeau, Esq.
MACDL Executive Director