

FRANNIE PEABODY CENTER

Comprehensive HIV & AIDS Services

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May 13, 2021

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee:

My name is Katie Rutherford and I am writing on behalf of Frannie Peabody Center, Maine's largest HIV/AIDS services organization, in strong support of LD 1478, An Act To Decriminalize Homelessness.

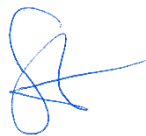
Frannie Peabody Center works directly with over 400 individuals living with HIV/AIDS, many of whom face housing instability. Frannie Peabody Center administers three federally funded housing grants known as HOPWA, or Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS. Our subsidy program, similar to a Section 8 voucher, has over 100 people currently safely housed; however more than 80 individuals are on a waitlist. As vouchers become available, it is almost impossible to find an available unit that falls within HUD guidelines, forcing individuals deeper into a housing crisis. Our staff members see the positive health outcomes that can result when housing stability is achieved and witness the devastating impact that homelessness can have on those we serve.

As more and more individuals face housing stability amid economic uncertainty and lack of affordable housing, we must work together to facilitate compassionate strategies that contribute to long-term solutions. LD 1478 ensures appropriate resources are available in moments of crisis, particularly for those struggling with substance misuse and mental illness. It is also critical in making sure our community members are treated with dignity and respect when they are trying to survive overwhelming conditions.

Partnering trained social service professionals with law enforcement interactions allows for safe linkage to care and offers a pathway to stability, rather than perpetuating a cycle of punishment and poverty.

I urge you to pass LD 1478 to strengthen and support our community members in need.

Respectfully,



Katie Rutherford
Executive Director
Frannie Peabody Center