



April 25, 2023

Senator Anne Beebe-Center
Representative Suzanne Salisbury
Honorable Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
Maine State Legislature
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: Testimony in support of LD 1514 – An Act to Promote Safe, Short-term Housing to Individuals Recently Released from Correctional Facilities.

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and honorable members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

My name is Richard A. Hooks Wayman, and I am a resident of Maine and serve as the President & CEO for VOA Northern New England which is headquartered in Brunswick. I wish to offer this letter as my written testimony in support of LD 1514 to establish transitional housing services to persons recently released from correctional facilities.

Volunteers of America (VOA) Northern New England is a faith-based community nonprofit that works with households experiencing deep poverty, disabilities, and homelessness. Our organization provides community justice reentry services, including mobile case management services, to persons reentering community life after incarceration in Waldo and Knox Counties. VOA is either the only or one of a few nonprofits receiving federal funding under the Second Chance Act from the Department of Justice in Maine. Further, VOA has a long history of providing affordable, transitional and supportive housing for persons experiencing homelessness.

From our experience, we know that housing is a social determinant of health and foundational to community life. One of the largest barriers facing persons exiting jails and prisons is finding safe, affordable housing close to employment opportunities, family connections, and community resources. Too many formerly incarcerated individuals face homelessness upon discharge. I am writing in support of LD 1514 to establish a transitional housing program within the Department of Corrections, and in partnership with MaineHousing, focused on the specific needs of persons with histories of criminal justice system involvement.

I am particularly pleased to see the proposed creation of a transitional housing fund to be administered by the Department of Corrections to 'support transitional housing for recently released clients...' While not specified in the bill, I would assume that the fund would be flexible enough to cover the spectrum of expenses to establish and maintain a transitional housing program, including: (a) capital investments for construction, purchase, and rehabilitation of apartments, (b) housing maintenance expenses, (c) rental

assistance on a per monthly basis, (d) supportive services needed to offer housing support services, and (e) expenses related to furnishings or utility charges that may be necessary to equip the units and ease access to the housing for program participants.

My only concern with the proposal is the goal that it offer support for only two (2) months. While many individuals will want to only access transitional housing for a short-period of time before moving into other long-term or market-rate housing opportunities, others may face barriers to being accepted as new tenants. Past criminal histories, the need to access treatment and stabilize recovery, chronic health conditions, mental health disabilities, anxiety and social isolation may require longer-term rental assistance. My hope would be that the transitional housing fund would be created with the expectation of a short-term stay and allow individual assessments at two months to determine which program participant would require longer-term transitional support services of up to nine (9) months. This would allow for a client-centered approach and flexible procedures to balance the need to move people onto other housing options with the need to address substantial barriers.

The establishment of this transitional housing program would prevent recidivism and improve public safety in our Maine counties. Allowing the Department of Corrections to partner with community-based organizations would lead to the effective and efficient utilization of these new resources.

I would ask you to give this bill serious consideration and your approval. Thank you for your public service.

Sincerely,



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