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March 11, 2025

Re: LD 128, An Act to Support Permitting of Certain Multifamily Housing Developments Under the Site Location of Development Laws

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM. CHOM's small staff works collaboratively to create housing enriched with services to help people overcome challenges.

I am testifying in support of LD 128 An Act to Support Permitting of Certain Multifamily Housing Developments Under the Site Location of Development Laws. *This bill amends the definition of "subdivision" for purposes of the site location of development laws to allow lots that include detached residential housing designed to accommodate up to 4 families, including accessory dwelling units, instead of just single-family housing. This bill also specifies that rules made by the Board of Environmental Protection to permit, by rule, any class of activities that would otherwise require individual issuance of a permit or approval by the board are routine technical rules.*

This bill would further enhance the changes made as a result of LD 2003, An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions. This landmark bill, recognized nationally, made substantive, positive changes to reduce zoning and land use barriers to the development of affordable and supportive housing.

As Members of this Committee know, there is an overall shortage of affordable housing for all populations in our state. Maine is facing a gap of 84,000 affordable homes over the next decade – Maine simply needs more housing. Without it, we won't make a real difference in ending homelessness. MaineHousing and the Legislature have made great strides at increasing resources toward housing development. Yet there is still there an extraordinary unmet demand for affordable, quality housing for all populations, as well as supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness with complex issues such as serious and persistent mental illness, substance use disorder, and trauma from domestic violence. We will need other tools as well, and key among them is improved zoning processes and eased land use restrictions. LD 128 offers a creative pathway to increasing access to affordable and supportive housing by doing just that.

This bill would allow detached residential housing designed to accommodate up to 4 households, including accessory dwelling units, instead of just single-family housing. This could be a game-changer for developing vital affordable and supportive housing in service center communities.

The specific changes in this bill would open the door for the creation of permanent supportive housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness - the group that costs the system far more to serve while unhoused. Chronically homeless populations are up to 29 times more likely to be in the hospital and up to 57 times more likely to be in jail than when unhoused than when housed. This bill would help Maine address the housing shortage for this specific population, saving the state a lot of money and bettering the lives of people who are struggling.

Please support LD 128 and any other bill that would improve zoning and land use for the creation of affordable and supportive housing, which would significantly help Maine end and prevent homelessness.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.