

The Honorable Members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee Maine State  
Legislature 100 State House Station Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee,

My name is Abby Spadone, and I am the Clinical Director of Shalom House. We are a nonprofit agency that provides services and housing to adults living with severe and persistent mental illness. I am writing to express my strong support for LD 748, "An Act to Increase Bridging Rental Assistance Program (BRAP) Housing Voucher Funding to Reduce the Current Partial Waiting List and Increase Housing Vouchers for Persons Living with Mental Health Challenges." This bill is long overdue and represents a critical step toward addressing the pressing housing needs of individuals living with mental health challenges in Maine.

As the Central Administrating Agency of this program, we are intimately aware of not only the immense benefits of this program but also the serious implications of this program not being funded fully. As rental rates continue to rise and the lack of truly affordable housing options persists, this program will remain a cornerstone option for those in the greatest need.

Currently:

- **1,056** Mainers are safely housed because of BRAP. (*777 Voucher Holders and 279 household members, of which 195 are children.*)
- **166** Maine Households with at least 1 child are housed because of BRAP.
- **126** Mainers are newly awarded a voucher and are looking for safe housing because of BRAP.
- **398** Maine landlords rely on funding BRAP.
- Of those housed on BRAP, **412** Mainers with severe and persistent mental health concerns would still be homeless if not for BRAP.

If this bill is not passed, the outcome could be dire for many Mainers as the increased funding is essential in continuing to provide stable housing for this population. As it stands now, if this additional funding is not made available and we have to continue at our regularly budgeted

amount, we will be forced to begin the process of reducing the number of active participants by roughly **112** voucher-holders, meaning that **112** currently stable households will be forced into Homelessness.

Stable housing is a cornerstone of mental health recovery and overall well-being. By increasing funding for BRAP, LD 748 will ensure continued access to housing vouchers, directly supporting getting Mainers out of homelessness and into safe housing after hospitalizations. This will ensure that the Mainers who are currently utilizing BRAP vouchers, will be able to remain in safe, stable housing so that are able to thrive in their communities.

The proposed extra annual allocation of \$660,000 to BRAP is a necessary investment to help address the increased number of participants as well as the increased cost of housing in the state of Maine. By restoring access to housing vouchers, LD 748 will ensure that more individuals living with mental health challenges can access the support they need.

I urge you to support LD 748 and demonstrate Maine's commitment to supporting its residents' mental health and housing stability. Thank you for considering this important legislation.

Respectfully Submitted By:

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