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LD 748

Senator Curry - Chair, Representative Traci Gere - Chair Members of the Housing and Economic Committee:

I am submitting testimony in strong support of this vital bill, LD 748 to increase funding for the Bridging Rental Assistance Program (BRAP). This investment is necessary to reduce the program's waiting list and ensure that more Mainers living with serious mental health challenges have access to stable housing.

BRAP is a lifeline for individuals with psychiatric disabilities who need safe, affordable housing to maintain stability and engage in treatment. This program helps bridge the gap while participants wait for long-term rental assistance, such as federal Housing Choice Vouchers. However, without sufficient funding, many individuals remain on a partial waiting list, unable to access the support they desperately need. Maine is experiencing an unprecedented housing crisis, and individuals with serious mental illness are among the most vulnerable. Without stable housing, people living with mental health challenges face increased hospitalization, encounters with the criminal justice system, and homelessness. The lack of available BRAP vouchers leaves many individuals in unsafe or unstable living situations, which can quickly lead to deterioration in their mental and physical health.

The need for increased funding is clear. The 2021 policy change that increased BRAP's contribution toward rent was necessary to reflect rising housing costs, but it also led to higher program expenses. Without additional funding, the program is unable to keep up with demand, leaving eligible individuals on a waiting list with no clear path to housing. The proposed \$660,000 per year in additional funding would address this shortfall, reducing the waiting list and ensuring that more Mainers in need receive housing assistance.

Investing in BRAP is not just the right thing to do—it is also fiscally responsible. Stable housing reduces costly emergency interventions, including psychiatric hospitalizations, law enforcement involvement, and emergency shelter usage. Studies consistently show that housing support programs like BRAP reduce overall public expenditures by decreasing reliance on crisis services. By increasing funding for BRAP, Maine will save money while improving lives.

Housing is healthcare. Individuals with mental illness cannot focus on recovery, employment, or community engagement when they are struggling just to survive. Every day that a person remains unhoused increases the risk of worsening mental health symptoms, substance use, and premature death. Expanding BRAP funding is an essential step toward ensuring that all Mainers—regardless of mental health status—have the opportunity to live in safe, stable housing.

I urge you to support this bill and ensure that the Bridging Rental Assistance Program has the resources needed to meet the growing demand for housing assistance. Maine's most vulnerable residents cannot afford to wait.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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