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April 25, 2025

Re: LD 1522, An Act to Establish the Maine Eviction Prevention Program

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 creates housing and inclusive communities for vulnerable populations in Maine.

I am testifying in strong support LD 1522, An Act to Establish the Maine Eviction Prevention Program. *Public Law 2023, chapter 643, Part KKKK, section 3 established an eviction prevention pilot program within the Maine State Housing Authority. This bill establishes the Maine Eviction Prevention Program as a permanent program within the authority and provides funding for the program (\$25 million in each year of the biennium).*

The Eviction Prevention Program, a diversion/prevention program created by lawmakers last year, has delivered significant positive outcomes in addressing housing instability and preventing homelessness. It has helped Maine renters stay housed and extended a lifeline to people with low incomes in a housing crisis – effectively preventing homelessness for extremely vulnerable populations who otherwise would have landed in our shelters or on our streets. However, this effective program was originally designed as a pilot, and as such is set to end.

LD 1522 would build on this successful two-year pilot, which has already helped hundreds of Maine families keep a roof over their heads.

Maine's homeless shelters are at capacity and many are overflowing, forcing people to attempt to live outside. Across our homeless system, we continue to have inflow but very little outflow into stable housing. This means our system is stuck.

Stopping the inflow is a critical step to keep our stuck system from getting worse.

Funding diversion/prevention programs will thwart inflow, keeping people out of homelessness so they won't become stuck.

Preventing homelessness is far easier and less expensive than addressing it after it happens. Once someone falls into homelessness, it becomes significantly harder to regain stability, and it leads to long-term reliance on shelters and other costly emergency interventions.

The State of Connecticut's diversion/prevention program has demonstrated remarkable success in reducing homelessness, achieving a 53% decrease in unhoused populations.

Investing in this program is expected to help Maine address homelessness by preventing it.

We have seen that a rather small investment in Maine's Eviction Prevention Program has paid considerable dividends. It is wise to do more.

It makes sense to keep people from entering an already overburdened system. This bill presents a feasible way to do that.

Please pass LD 1522 so that Maine has the resources it needs to end and prevent homelessness.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.