

Anna Brewer
Homeless Voices for Justice

Good Afternoon Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Today I am submitting testimony on behalf of Homeless Voices for Justice, which is based in Portland, ME. Homeless Voices for Justice is a grassroots organization, organized by people who are or have experienced homelessness. We seek to empower people experiencing homelessness and poverty whose perspectives are often excluded from the development of policies. We do this through protest, education, positive policy change, and reform.

We are speaking today in support of LD47. The Portland Community Free Clinic on India Street is a vital resource for our community in Portland, in addition to the many more free clinics throughout the state. However, these clinics are always dealing with financial instability that threatens to close their doors.

People experiencing homelessness and poverty are at a higher risk of health complications due their housing status. They experience higher rates of respiratory illness, infections due to untreated injuries and illnesses, as well as medical complications from prolonged weather exposure, to name a few. In addition, when you are experiencing homelessness and poverty, it can be very difficult to access the services that you need. If you don't have health insurance, for example, you do not have access to preventative care, and you often struggle to get and afford the medical care you need when you become sick or injured. Free health clinics bridge this gap, and they are a lifeline for people in need, but they can only do so with essential funding.

As Homeless Voices for Justice, we believe strongly in improving access to low-barrier services. We are in the middle of a global pandemic and the most vulnerable in our communities are being hit the hardest. This last year has shown us how broken our public healthcare system is, and this bill is one step in the right direction. More funding to support free health clinics in the State of Maine means that more people in our community will have access to the critical healthcare services that they need. We urge you to pass this bill because everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, should have access to healthcare.

Thank you for your time.