

# The Gathering Place

WELCOME IS OUR MISSION

February 10, 2021

## **Testimony in Support of LD-47 An Act to Provide Funding to the Department of Health and Human Services to Support Free Health Clinics in the State**

Dear members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Mary Connolly Executive Director of the Gathering Place in Brunswick, Maine, and I am writing in support of LD 47.

The mission of The Gathering Place (TGP) is to provide a safe, welcoming, and comfortable space for the homeless, poor, and isolated to gather in downtown Brunswick where we offer our guests respect, encouragement, companionship, support, and hope. The Gathering Place was established in 2010 as a low-demand drop-in center. As a result, the day shelter succeeds in drawing in all who need support and companionship. We serve the Greater Brunswick geographical area, encompassing Cumberland, Sagadahoc, and Androscoggin counties; the majority of our guests live in Brunswick, Bath, Topsham, Harpswell, and Bowdoinham. On a typical day, we warmly welcome between 80 and 100 guests, including men, women, and children (average 93 based on fourth quarter attendance). In a typical year, we reach approximately 600 individuals. The Gathering Place has become a refuge for so many who desire the opportunity to feel valued, welcomed, and supported.

We concentrate on providing many of the basic life necessities that are unsustainable when one does not have stable housing, food, shelter, health care, access to bathrooms, toiletries, clean clothing, and mail service. Demographically, 20% of our guests are young adults (aged 19-24), 42% adults, and 38% seniors (65+), and racial-ethnic groups are representative of the surrounding community: 96% Caucasian, 2% Black, and 2% Hispanic/Latino. While The Gathering Place does not ask guests for information about income and our open-door policy welcomes all without question or judgment, our mission targets the deeply and materially poor and homeless, and we believe that 100% of our guests fall into the category of low-to-moderate income.

Having access to free medical and dental care has been a lifeline to so many who come through our doors. The Oasis Free Clinic as well as other free community health centers, make it

possible for those under and uninsured to receive quality care. There is, and will continue to be, people who need these services. Dental care, in particular, is in huge demand, as the need for free dental care is overwhelming, even among those with MaineCare. For many of our guests, the lack of dental hygiene has caused lasting health issues.

Since we opened our doors in 2010, we have raised the money necessary to operate through individuals, religious organizations, businesses, the United Way, and private foundations. The people in the communities we serve have funded us because they believe in the work that we do. I ask that the State of Maine consider joining them by funding free clinics to care for the most vulnerable in our communities.

Thank you for your consideration, and I encourage you to support LD 47.