



130th Maine Legislature, First Session
Joint Standing Committee on Health
and Human Services Testimony of
Erik C. Jorgensen, MaineHousing,
in favor of

**LD 475 - An Act to Create the Frequent Users System
Engagement Collaborative**

24 March, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Erik Jorgensen, Director of Government Relations at the Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing).

MaineHousing has been helping Maine people own, rent, repair, and heat their homes since 1969. MaineHousing is an independent state authority created to address the problems of unsafe, unsuitable, overcrowded, and unaffordable housing. We are authorized to issue bonds to finance single family mortgages for first time homebuyers and for affordable multi-family housing.

We are also authorized to administer a number of state and federal programs including rental subsidies, weatherization, fuel assistance, two housing block grants, the low-income housing tax credit program, and homeless grant programs. We receive state general fund revenue for homeless programs and receive a dedicated portion of the real estate transfer tax for the Housing Opportunities for Maine (HOME) Fund.

This Resolve challenges its members do important work. It will build on the work of the Statewide Homeless Council, the homeless shelter providers, and hard work of many others impacted. We know there is no magic bullet and that successfully helping the most frequent users of our social services, medical facilities, jails, prisons, and homeless shelters will take hard work.

We are, however, happy to say that even though the original version of this bill got sidelined by the shutdown many parts of this work are already underway. With regard to housing, we are in the final stages of designing a Coordinated Entry system which

prioritizes people by vulnerability and length of stay in the shelter system, in order to match them with the appropriate housing resources. Those meeting the criteria for FUSE will have the highest priority. This system will be implemented through the nine 'Homeless Service Hubs' that are being created based on the work of the Statewide Homeless Council to redesign the homeless service response system in the state.

This past year we have made a special effort to get unsheltered individuals inside and into hotels or shelters with funding related to the pandemic. Two of the areas where most of the individuals qualifying for FUSE are located (Portland and Bangor) have been awarded funding to implement a "Rapid Rehousing" program prioritizing those in this group who are most vulnerable to returning to unsheltered homelessness.

We are also working with a group of stakeholders and a consultant to develop a plan to create 200 new units of supportive housing, and the American Rescue Act has provisions for acquisition and rehab of properties to create additional shelter/ supportive housing capacity. We will be looking to take advantage of that funding.

All of this work is being organized under the auspices of the Statewide Homeless Council. The homeless response system redesign they are developing will focus on those experiencing chronic homelessness.

Finally, with regard to services, a group of stakeholders has been working with MaineCare (under Health Homes) to develop outreach and pre-and-post-tenancy supportive services. This effort will focus on a population experiencing long-term homelessness along with chronic health conditions that would meet the criteria for FUSE in order to assist them in obtaining housing and maintaining housing stability.

So, as I hope I've shown, much of this is already underway, and we are very excited about the direction things are heading in. That begs the question about whether this bill is still necessary. We would answer by saying that there is value in bringing diverse parties to the table and in formalizing programs. We would seek to incorporate what we have learned and are doing now, with whatever the FUSE collaborative discovers and advises going forward.