



**Shalom House**

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Mary Haynes-Rodgers, LCSW  
*Executive Director*

RE: LD 475, Resolve, To Create the Frequent Users System Engagement Collaborative

Representative Meyer, Senator Claxton, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Norman Maze and I am Deputy Director for Shalom House, Inc. I am submitting testimony today on behalf of Shalom House as strongly in favor of LD 475, A Resolve, To Create the Frequent Users System Engagement Collaborative.

Shalom House is a nonprofit agency which provides housing and services to adults living with severe and persistent mental illness. We are also contracted by Maine's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to oversee the administration of the state's Bridging Rental Assistance Program (BRAP) and the grants awarded to DHHS by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) under its Continuum of Care/ Shelter Plus Care Program. Both rental subsidy programs are for Mainers living with a mental health disability, many of whom are in the midst of homelessness or other housing-related crisis prior to receiving a rental voucher.

To provide some background, BRAP was created to address immediate housing needs of persons leaving the Augusta Mental Health Institute (AMHI), since replaced by Riverview Psychiatric Center, using rental assistance vouchers. Today, BRAP serves individuals across the state who are leaving psychiatric hospitals, community residential treatment programs, being released from county jails or state prisons, as well as those exiting long-term homelessness. Shelter Plus Care serves persons experiencing long-term and chronic homelessness. Some individuals over-utilize emergency services or become incarcerated due to their mental health or substance use struggles. While rental subsidies do help many, others lack support and lose ground in their recovery process due to the severity of their symptoms ...combating mental health symptoms or dependencies on alcohol, opioids, or other substances. Even with rental voucher in-hand, they may find themselves (perhaps again, with one or more of these circumstances), homeless, hospitalized, or lastly, languishing in our corrections system so ill-equipped to support such individuals. By providing support to these individuals sooner, much of their suffering and the unintended consequences of their behaviors might prevent them from finding themselves in these situations, where they may use our emergency services beyond what such services are meant to provide.

Because this plan involves emergency homeless shelters, if enacted, I encourage that someone with hands-on shelter expertise be selected and appointed by the director of MaineHousing to take part in the work of the collaborative.

Without this plan, those who struggle on the streets or are in danger of ending up homeless due to untreated mental health or substance use disorders will continue to struggle with their life challenges, burdening already overtaxed emergency services, emergency shelter, hospitals, and justice system. In housing...safe affordable housing...they are able to focus on their health and emotional needs, especially with the right supports...and not on daily survival. They, too, deserve to lead stable and fulfilling lives of their choosing like anyone else.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on LD 475.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Norman Maze  
Deputy Director