



# home help hope

March 24, 2021

**Re: LD 475, An Act to Create a Frequent Users Systems Engagement Collaborative ( FUSE)**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, thank you for your time and attention in considering FUSE. My name is Stephanie Primm. I have the privilege of serving as the Executive Director of Knox County Homeless Coalition in Rockport, Chair of the Statewide Homeless Council, and I serve on the steering committee for the Maine ( Homeless) Shelter Network.

I am testifying today on behalf of the Statewide Homeless Council and the Knox County Homeless Coalition, in support of LD 475.

Anytime 1% of any given challenge is utilizing 30% of resources—it just makes sense to take action. Here in Maine, we all share pride in our desire to ‘do the right thing’ for human beings and meeting basic human needs—and FUSE is just that—the right thing to do.

FUSE will ultimately provide critical, humane supportive housing and services to people who simply are not able or equipped to live independently, and for whom there are very few or ZERO options other than living in the streets, the woods or unsafe situations.

My colleagues here today will provide a great deal of excellent cost benefit analysis—as well as data that shows how successful implementation of FUSE in other states has resulted in undeniable success—saving resource and solving the problem of our Frequent Users.

In the last year, homelessness in Maine has been exponentially exacerbated by COVID complexities, costs and pressures on what was already a fragile homeless response system to begin with.

And frequent users of our homeless response and support systems—especially in Rural Maine face even greater life threatening risk as well as high cost of humane handling.

**Our mission:** Breaking the cycle of poverty and homelessness in Midcoast Maine.

Hospitality House Family Shelter and The Landing Place are programs of Knox County Homeless Coalition.

Knox County Homeless Coalition is a 501(c)3 not for profit organization, EIN # 46-313-6785.

**KNOX COUNTY  
HOMELESS COALITION**

**Mailing Address:**

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**The Landing Place  
Youth Center:**

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In Rural Maine there are no options. The chronically homeless, emotionally or physically limited have no warming centers to turn to, emergency overnight shelters, or places to get out of the weather. There is no 'housing first'. There is no access to public transportation. There is no supportive housing. A homeless individual or family being discharged from the E.R. will be discharged into the cold—if they're lucky in a cab that may take them to a hidden unsafe spot they've been tucked away in—because they have no home, no transportation and no options.

Our Family Shelter in Rockport is always full.

Fuse is a 'do the right thing' bill. We know how to do this. This would allow shelters and service providers to free up resources to try to whittle away at long wait lists, overstretched case-loads-- and be able to focus more time and money on entire families who are well positioned to get back to healthy productive independence throughout our communities in Maine.

## **Additional information about FUSE.**

There is a small number of people in Maine who are known by name to hospitals, homeless shelters, police, rescue, and jails, because they frequently interact with all of these systems. Because all of these different expensive emergency systems operate in separate silos, and resources are stretched thin with lots of crises, nothing ever gets done to solve the predominant problem for these people: They stay unhoused. And while unhoused, they ricochet through our most expensive emergency systems. Sometimes for decades. This must stop.

FUSE would allow the creation of the Frequent Users System Engagement Collaborative among all the complementary agencies and service providers cross Maine. This collaborative would develop a plan to provide stable housing and services to the approximately 200 persons who are chronically homeless or at risk of homelessness in our state. These folks are the most frequent consumers of high-cost services, such as psychiatric hospitals, emergency shelters, emergency rooms, police, jails and prisons.

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Once people are housed, they stop ricocheting through our most expensive systems. We all save money and time. Homeless shelters, jails, hospitals and emergency rooms will not be overcrowded with the same people. Police and rescue personnel will be able to focus on the general population rather than mostly on the same small group of people they frequently see for petty offenses. And the homeless response system personnel can focus on helping families well positioned to return to independence---to do so.

FUSE targets the 1% who use 30% of our resources. Without FUSE, things will stay the same. We will all be busy, stretched thin, and in crisis with the same people overwhelming us – because they will stay in crisis indefinitely.

Respectfully Submitted with gratitude to all for your time and consideration of FUSE.

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