

Good morning committee members,

My name is Samuel Chamberlain, I am a resident of South Portland, and am testifying in support of LD 1076. I am speaking to you today not only as a social worker who works in homeless services, but also as a former recipient of services of a Maine homeless youth agency.

As you have heard, and will continue to hear today, young people who are accessing emergency shelters need the time, consistency, and connection that is provided in emergency shelters. When stays in these shelters are restricted to 30 days, young people are being put in more vulnerable positions in order to reset their 30-day count.

I remember accessing an emergency shelter as a 16-year-old and forming strong relationships with staff, working on rebuilding and reaffirming relationships with my family, and remaining connected to my school and support system. On my 31<sup>st</sup> day at the shelter, I was told I needed to leave, I moved to another youth shelter in Maine – more than an hour from my family, community, and the providers whom I trusted.

I remember moving to an unfamiliar community, unfamiliar school system, and a significantly more restrictive shelter program. I remember feeling disconnected, lonely, and afraid. I wanted nothing more than to return to my community.

I was privileged to have a staunch advocate in my support system, who was able to help me return to the first shelter I had entered. However, during my stay, I saw all too many young people reach their 31<sup>st</sup> day, and have the shelter be forced to release the bed to another young person, or have that young person move further away from their family and community, and in some instances enter more dangerous situations by sleeping on the street or with unsafe persons.

During my stay in the first emergency shelter, I was able to build strong relationships with staff and providers, and work on the relationships I had with my family. As we know, most young people become homeless due to familial conflict, and as you can imagine it is difficult to work through years of hardship in 30 days.

As a social worker who works in homeless services, I see each day the incredible power that comes with a stable bed. Being able to know where you are going to rest your head, that your belongings are safe, and that someone is there to remind you that you are cared for, is one of the most impactful ways for someone to start working towards permanent solutions.

As a former recipient of youth homeless services, I can tell you that 30 days does not lend itself to the healing, reunification, and individual growth that is necessary for young people to move towards a permanent plan.

When we ask shelters to set 30 day timers on a young person's stay, we are giving a young person a 30 day deadline to make leaps and bounds on an incredibly difficult journey. A journey that is not helped by a 30 day reset. A journey that can make no real progress in 30 days. A journey that is stunted by red tape.

I implore you to give some of the most vulnerable young people in our state the time that is needed to make real progress, and the ability to heal, connect, and be safe.

Thank you.