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Good morning Senator Caxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services; I am Nate Libby, I proudly represent all of the people of Lewiston in the Maine Senate. I'm here to present LD 1076, "An Act To Support the Operations of Youth Shelters in Maine."

As some committee members may know, outside of my legislative duties I've worked as nonprofit consultant and last year I was tasked with working with a local CAP agency in standing up and managing three temporary shelters as part of our community's response to the pandemic. Those projects caused me to become very familiar with the experience of our state's youth shelters and the challenges they face in meeting their critical mission.

Last fall, I asked the three youth shelters - Preble Street Resource Center in Portland, New Beginnings in Lewiston, and Shaw House in Bangor – to work with me on a bill to help a few of their most pressing and significant needs. This bill seeks to make their day-to-day operations more streamlined with respect to state reporting and approvals, and provides additional funding given that their appropriation had been curtailed and has remained flat for more than 15 years.

Here are the major parts of the bill summarized and explained:

- 1) The bill amends the definitions in current Maine statute of "emergency children's shelter" and "shelter for homeless children" to extend from 30 consecutive days or overnights to 90 consecutive days or overnights the length of time a child may stay at such a facility. I want to be clear that 90 days is not some arbitrary number. We arrived here because 30 days is virtually impossible to find a suitable home for the youth that come through these facilities. By switching to 90 days, we give these youth suitable time to stabilize from whatever difficult life circumstances cause them to arrive there and it gives them time to save cash resources to get an apartment. Apartments were hard enough to find before COVID-19, and are even more difficult now. Thirty days simply does not suffice. Moreover, with the current 30 days, too often these shelters see these adolescents come back to their facilities time and time again. We are confident that switching to 90 days would give enough time to mediate the situation effectively so that the solution can be more permanent.
- 2) It requires DHHS to amend its rules to allow a youth to be admitted for up to 30 days without first notifying the child's guardian. I want to make it clear that these shelters' number one priority is to have these youth return home. With that said, this change gives the

shelters enough time to work with the youth and let them be the one to give permission to notify the guardian by their choosing. Doing this begins the mediation process between the child and the family in a more productive manner. It also gives the family reasonable time to think over the situation and their role in how their child ended up there. Too often parents are notified early on and try to remove the child as soon as possible because they fear losing them to OCFS if the situation gets worse. By switching this to 30 days, it allows the family and the child to thoughtfully process the situation and begin the process to bring them home safely.

- 3) Finally, the bill increases the annual state appropriation from \$2.0MM to \$2.5MM, which represents a restoration of the funds they received prior to 2005. Their funding has remained flat for over 15 years. Had this appropriation tracked with inflation, they'd be receiving \$2.7MM annually. We aren't asking for new money, but for the money to be restored.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today and I am happy to answer questions you may have.