

April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Izzy Ostrowski, and I am the Social Change Advocate at Preble Street. Today, I am reading on behalf of a client at our Teen Services program who is in support of LD 1076: An Act To Support the Operations of Youth Shelters in Maine.

As someone who is currently staying at the teen shelter, I have firsthand experience of how these policies impact people. If the 30-day rule was changed, it would benefit youth experiencing homelessness in a big way. If someone is staying at the teen shelter, then they probably don't have anywhere to go thirty days from now. Thirty days is an unrealistic expectation for a teen to be housed. Even if a teen is coming in with a job, it still takes more time. I have been staying at the teen shelter for more than a month, and I am still waiting to be housed. Having to leave the shelter after thirty days so the thirty-day cap can re-set creates unnecessary trauma for youth who have experienced abuse and neglect. This is an extremely negative policy for youth- especially for those that are as young as fifteen years old and who don't have many options. Fifteen is a young age and youth that age should be focusing on school, sports, hobbies, and things that they like to do. Instead, they're dealing with their situation and trying to cope. Teens shouldn't have to be put through the stress of figuring out where to stay for a night.

The policy around notifying, or obtaining permission from, a youth's guardian is also a necessary change. If someone comes from an abusive family and is running away from home, immediately calling their guardian, and telling them where they are, ruins the confidentiality. This could also put them in a position of being back in that situation and experiencing trauma. For many teens who come to the shelter, home probably isn't the best situation to be dealing with at the time.

More funding for youth shelters is needed so that there can be more opportunities. With additional funding, we can do more activities that will help create a healthy, supported lifestyle and have more resources to accomplish goals. This could include outdoor activities like playing basketball and other energizing games. We should be giving teens an opportunity to have fun and do things that they want to do.

This bill would also help with the mental health of youth experiencing homelessness. More funding would mean additional activities to stimulate mental health. If a teen didn't have to worry about where they would have to stay on their thirtieth night or the shelter staff contacting their guardian right away, their mental health would be better. Right now, these policies create a lot of anxiety and trauma. For this reason, I ask that you vote in support of this bill and make sure that youth experiencing homelessness are more supported.