

State of Maine | 131st Legislature
Joint Select Committee on Housing
Testimony of Dr. Renee Fay-LeBlanc on behalf of Greater Portland Health
April 4, 2023

Supporting:

LD 2, "An Act to End Chronic Homelessness by Creating the Housing First Fund "

Sponsored by Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross

Members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, my name is Renee Fay-LeBlanc and I serve as the Chief Medical Officer at Greater Portland Health. Greater Portland Health is one of Maine's 20 community health centers (CHCs), also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), and part of the largest independent primary care network in the state.

At Greater Portland Health we provide primary care services, integrated behavioral health, and dental services regardless of people's ability to pay. Our Bayside site is a designated Healthcare for the Homeless site by the federal government and over 30% of the 13,000 patients we care for are experiencing homelessness.

I strongly support LD 2 and thank Speaker Talbot Ross for bringing legislation forward to support additional housing first locations throughout the state.

Housing is healthcare.

I have witnessed firsthand the power of housing and how having a place to call home improves health. Patients are better able to store medication, which leads to better adherence. They have a place to store and refrigerate food, which can lead to better nutrition. They can access a bathroom which can improve personal hygiene, and they are able to get more restful sleep. Patients also have more time to focus on other aspects of their lives, including health, when they are not spending their days focused on where they will spend the night.

Housing First not only affords all of these advantages to their clients, but the philosophy of Housing First supports people who have experienced homelessness for a long time and helps them succeed in the transition from homelessness to housing. For many, this is a difficult transition. Some of the skills that are protective on the streets; like hoarding or heightened vigilance, can prove difficult in a traditional rental situation. The support staff at Housing First are amazing in their ability to help their clients feel safe.

Housing First is a proven model. It works. On behalf of Greater Portland Health, thank you for considering my comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly at rfay-leblanc@greaterportlandhealth.org with any follow up questions.

Renee Fay-LeBlanc MD FACP

