



April 3, 2023

Senator Teresa Pierce  
Representative Tracy Gere  
Honorable Members of the Housing Committee  
Maine State Legislature  
c/o Legislative Information Office  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

**RE: Testimony in support of LD 2 with Amendments**

Dear Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and honorable members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Richard A. Hooks Wayman, and I am a resident of Maine and serve as the President & CEO for VOA Northern New England which is headquartered in Brunswick. I wish to offer this letter as my written testimony in support of LD 2 and to propose an amendment.

Volunteers of America (VOA) Northern New England is a faith-based community nonprofit that offers transitional and permanent supportive housing to U.S. Veterans and youth experiencing homelessness. Our most recent supportive housing program is Cabin in the Woods, a 21-unit permanent supportive housing community for U.S. Veterans and their families on the grounds of the Togus VA Medical Center.

**I write in support of LD 2 but would recommend two amendments to the bill's language.** Maine desperately needs more units of permanent supportive housing to end long-term homelessness. LD 2 offers the state a rare opportunity to dedicate state revenues to pay for supportive services that help our residents remain in stable housing. During the 2022 HUD point-in-time survey (the latest data available), 4,411 persons were counted as experiencing homelessness with 1,734 people self-identified as having mental health and/or a substance use disorder. LD 2 offers an important solution to addressing the suffering of those experiencing chronic and unsheltered homelessness.

However, I wish the Committee to remain focused on the goal to create a data-driven, accountable homeless response system in Maine that achieves outcomes of reduced incidences of homelessness. State funding is also critically needed for quality emergency shelters and mobile, flexible supportive services that could be deployed in scattered site housing programs or supportive housing responses that do not require 24-hour support. Housing First is a theory of practice or approach and not a housing structure.

I urge the Housing Committee to recognize that a system that ameliorates homelessness must include both shelter/outreach as well as the flexibility to serve different populations in a spectrum of housing opportunities. **VOA's Cabin in the Woods is a successful supportive housing program partially because we constructed separate units.** Based on Veteran feedback, we created detached homes for privacy, peace of mind, and a sense of safety. Many of our Veteran residents would not have wanted to move into a large single-site, Housing First building with 24-hour services.

LD 2 must support a variety of Housing First approaches that will serve both urban and rural communities.

Accordingly, I am writing to suggest two important amendments to LD 2:

- Where the bill reads, “Services facilitated under the program must be available on site, 24 hours a day...” be amended to say “Services facilitated under the program must be available on site, up to 24 hours a day...”
- Further, the definition for chronic homelessness in the bill is confusing. To align with federal resources, I would recommend that LD 2 adopt the HUD definition of chronic homelessness. This definition was published in 2015 in Final Rule and applies to all HUD program participants in HUD Continuum of Care (McKinney-Vento Assistance Act) programs after January 2016. ([2015-30473.pdf \(govinfo.gov\)](#)).

VOA remains committed to ending homelessness in Maine and supports any effort to expand permanent supportive housing and housing first approaches as envisioned in LD 2. I would ask you to give this bill serious consideration, grant the amendments suggested, and offer your approval.

We look forward to contributing to efforts to construct a **data- and outcome-drive homeless response system** (inclusive of quality shelter, supportive housing, and flexible social services). Thank you for your public service to Maine!

Sincerely,



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