



United Way
of Southern Maine

LIVE UNITED

Testimony In Support of LD 2 – An Act to End Chronic Homelessness by Creating the Housing First Fund

April 18, 2023

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing. My name is Ninette Irabaruta, and I am the Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at United Way of Southern Maine (UWSM). I am here today on behalf of UWSM to support LD 2: An Act to End Chronic Homeless by Creating the Housing First Fund.

UWSM is an organization that mobilizes the caring power of community by bringing people and resources together to address immediate needs and find long-term solutions to the challenging problems of our times. And one of our most challenging problems today is chronic homelessness across the State of Maine. This is not just a Greater Portland issue.

This bill provides funding to support Housing First, which can be a successful solution for people experiencing chronic homelessness across the State.

Maine has done it before. The first Housing First site to open in the State was back in 2005 – [Logan Place](#) on Frederick Street in Portland.¹ Housing First is designed to target individuals and families with chronic illness, mental health issues, or substance use disorders who have experienced either long-term or repeated homelessness. Housing First recognizes that stable housing is a prerequisite for effective psychiatric and substance use treatment and for improving quality of life.² Once stably housed, individuals are better able to take advantage of wrap-around services – to help support housing stability, employment, and recovery. Without stable housing, attaining these goals becomes much more difficult.³

LD 2 provides a starting point for the State to help stably house approximately more than 400 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. Housing First can quickly and permanently house individuals and families experiencing homelessness without preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment, or service participation requirements. UWSM also understands that communities save money on emergency services like police calls, emergency room visits, medical transports, jails, and emergency shelters when people are permanently housed.

It will also be important to make sure we support case management support, health care, income supports, employment services, and more that are required to go along with Housing First. Housing First is a whole-system orientation, and in some cases, a whole-system re-orientation.⁴ It is not enough for Housing First to simply exist or for these other services/programs to exist– they need to work as part of a whole system working together to help people.

In addition, we request that the Housing Committee amend LD 2 text to include all Housing First models. There are multiple successful, best-practice models for housing chronically homeless populations.⁵

We respectfully encourage you to support LD 2.

Thank you for your leadership and service.

¹ <https://www.pressherald.com/2017/09/09/maine-voices-housing-first-helps-both-the-homeless-and-the-community/>

² <https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Housing-First-Research.pdf>

³ <https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Housing-First-Research.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.usich.gov/news/four-clarifications-about-housing-first/>

⁵ [Evidence-Behind-Approaches-That-End-Homelessness-Brief-2019.pdf \(usich.gov\)](#)