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Good afternoon, Chair Carney, Chair Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Annika Moore, and I am the Advocacy Team Leader at Preble Street. Preble Street's mission is to provide accessible, barrier-free services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty and to advocate for solutions to these problems.

I am writing to support LD 521, which would create a pathway for Mainers struggling with homelessness and housing insecurity to find a safe, stable place to live. This bill would protect individuals from experiencing housing discrimination due to their source of income or their status as a Veteran or member of the military.

Preble Street's Veteran's Housing Services (VHS) assists Veterans and their families in finding and maintaining stable housing. Recently, a VHS caseworker from this program shared that their client, Jonathan B., experienced discrimination based on his Veteran status while looking for housing. After receiving an inquiry from Jonathan's caseworker, a landlord in Portland reached out to ask whether Jonathan was "all messed up from the war." This landlord's comment indicates that Jonathan was being discriminated against due to his status as a Veteran. If this law were to pass, it would ensure that those who have served our country, like Jonathan, would not face discrimination when searching for a safe place to live.

In addition, our state's current housing market makes it very difficult for low-income individuals and families to afford to rent within their communities, and housing vouchers are one of the most effective programs to address this problem. However, under current Maine law, landlords can deny voucher holders by claiming that renting to these tenants would pose an "administrative burden." This undermines the purpose of housing choice vouchers—to level the playing field and increase access to rental units—by making it far more difficult for voucher holders to find housing.

When a voucher is issued, the recipient must secure housing within a specific timeframe. Preble Street's caseworkers report working with clients who received a voucher but could not find housing before the time allotted to use it ran out. By increasing protections for voucher holders, more families and individuals would likely be able to use the voucher issued. This bill would also protect Veterans using HUD-VASH vouchers from discrimination. Clients of Preble Street's Veteran's Housing Services (VHS) use HUD-VASH vouchers—similar to Housing Choice Vouchers for non-Veterans—to find housing. This bill would also protect Veterans using HUD-VASH vouchers

from discrimination. Like with other kinds of vouchers, holders of HUD-VASH vouchers can experience discrimination because they receive assistance to pay for their housing.

[Research](#) has shown that housing non-discrimination legislation reduces voucher holders' denials. In jurisdictions with these laws, individuals and families encounter fewer barriers to housing. They can better use their vouchers in high-opportunity areas, another central goal of the Housing Choice Voucher program. If this law were implemented, it could mean that an additional 2,000 Maine households could find a lease within the required timeframe for their housing vouchers.

Preble Street urges you to vote in support of LD 521, which would protect our states' Veterans and allow Maine to join the 19 other states that prohibit housing discrimination based on source of income.

Thank you.