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Good afternoon Senator Rafferty and Representative Sylvester, and members of the joint standing committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Molly Feeney and I am the Director of Social Services at Knox County Homeless Coalition (KCHC), and a resident of Morrill, Maine. I am here today to testify in support of LD 473 – An act to support Maine Rental Assistance and Voucher Guarantee Program.

Today I have the privilege of sharing a few positive statistics with you all. But first I need to tee up a quick programming context; 6 short months ago, Maine State Housing Authority offered KCHC a pilot spot within their Rapid Rehousing - without getting into granular details- several components of this programming align with LD 473, but current participation eligibility is very specific to families and individuals who are experiencing homelessness- In short, Rapid Rehousing has offered us a new tool box, one with resources that are appealing and supportive to landlords- and access is dependent on client engagement. 18 out of 35 program spots have been filled within our community-as we reach the half way point since launching. 89% of those participating families have secured housing. In fact, in just the last 14 days we have supported 8 individuals and families in moving into sustainable housing- by way of the Rapid Rehousing Resources. Nearly every single one of these families have been supported through our shelter and/or emergency motels, which as all of know, despite the necessity, it comes at an incredible fiscal cost. Movement from shelter has been an exhausting battle, particularly in areas similar to Knox County who ranks number one in the state for lack of affordable housing solutions relative to the identified community needs and incomes.

Efforts like LD 473 that include landlord support, are effective, period. This legislation would provide for more assurance and insurance to landlords who otherwise cannot afford the risk- And maybe most importantly from where I stand we are finally building programming around prevention. That being said, we all know without reservation that “how” said programming is executed is what will determine the level of positive impact. We know definitively that comprehensive, holistic, and regular support to clients and landlords is the only answer when it comes to gently moving the needle with families who are seeking security and independence. Rental assistance, and voucher access will only be as effective at the housing Navigation program that is facilitating it. Maine State Housing Authority knows this, they have proven their understanding of complex human work in the way in which they structured their Rapid Rehousing pilot, as well as many of their other creative initiatives- and I certainly have full confidence that this design would be no exception.

Legislation is most often built on careful research and identification of need, LD 473 has the additional assurance of being tried and tested- This initiative will not only provide access for families who need help before they experience homelessness, but it will also strengthen our communities from a standpoint of effective and preventive options of care. If we do not start acting with more assertiveness around homeless prevention, it is just a matter of time before we inundate our already fragile and overloaded systems... accessing support before circumstances become irreversible is fiscally responsible, and most importantly, it is human.