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May 5, 2021

Re: LD 1269 An Act To Preserve Fair Housing in Maine

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Labor and Housing Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM, the largest supportive housing provider for homeless populations in Maine. Our staff of 11 works collaboratively with more than 50 different service provider organizations to effectively and efficiently house some 1100 of Maine's most vulnerable people. I am also a member of the Statewide Homeless Council, attend all of the Regional Homeless Councils, and serve as President of the Maine Continuum of Care Board of Directors.

I am testifying today on behalf of CHOM and the Maine Homeless Policy Committee in strong support of LD 1269, which would amend the laws governing Maine Housing to ensure that its funding is used to affirmatively further fair housing, defined "to engage actively in efforts to address barriers to and create opportunities for full and equal access to housing without discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, national origin, familial status or receipt of public assistance".

In August of 2020, the Administration at the time and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) published a final rule, the Preserving Community and Neighborhood Choice Rule, in the Federal Register which completely repealed the federal Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) Rule, seriously weakening the 1968 Fair Housing Act. This rule went into effect on September 8, 2020, and advocates fear that this Rule and the removal of AFFH could potentially restrict people of color, seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, LGBTQ people, victims of domestic violence, and others – from accessing housing. The current Administration is looking to repeal this rule, and revert back to the AFFH Rule, though the exact timing of this is to be determined. LD 1269 would importantly preserve the AFFH Rule in Maine, despite any changes on the Federal level.

The 1968 Fair Housing Act was a monumental, bipartisan, milestone civil rights bill protecting access to housing and preventing housing discrimination. The AFFH rule was a key method by which the tenets of the Fair Housing Act were upheld; its repeal on the Federal level could result in various vulnerable populations losing access to housing, putting them at imminent risk of homelessness. Reduced access to housing would create more barriers for people already experiencing homelessness. It is important that Maine correct this, and this bill does exactly that.

Discrimination and barriers to housing are root causes of homelessness; people of color are overrepresented in homelessness (as they are with COVID-19) in Maine. Maine's shelters are already at or exceeding capacity, especially now amid the pandemic. The federal rule as it stands now could further exacerbate the current homelessness crisis which no community in Maine is equipped to face. It helps none of us to make people homeless, or to allow people to languish in homelessness. It has been proven redundantly through numerous cost studies that housing is far less expensive than keeping people homeless. Rules that increase hardships and restrict access to housing for people experiencing poverty are not helpful to anyone. Maine has the chance to make this right by enacting LD 1269 and preserving long-sought protections for people of color, seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, LGBTQ people, victims of domestic violence, and others.

AFFH is part of important civil rights legislation that protects access to housing and provides pathways out of homelessness for the most vulnerable among us. I truly hope that the current Administration and Congress are working to remedy the harm that the Preserving Community and



Neighborhood Choice Rule could have nationally. In the meantime, LD 1269 would allow us to correct this injustice for Maine permanently, regardless of how the pendulum swings on the federal level.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.