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April 16, 2021

Re: LD 1300 An Act To Require County Governments To Coordinate with Municipalities To Create Plans To Address Homelessness

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and members of the State and Local Governments 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 in support of LD 1300, which would require the County Commissioners of each county, in consultation and coordination with the Statewide Homeless Council, Regional Homeless Councils, and the municipalities in the county, to develop and implement a plan with protocols to address homelessness within their counties.

It may appear that this bill would lead to a number of divergent plans, but I have come to believe that this bill would actually stress that local efforts are indeed aligned with the State Plan to End and Prevent Homelessness and other efforts by the Statewide Homeless Council and Regional Homeless Councils.

One of the biggest obstacles to ending homelessness is silos. This bill works to keep localities from acting in a siloed manner, but also nudges their involvement to be in synch with statewide strategies. It will take everyone working together to have Maine end and prevent homelessness.

This will challenge localities to actively work together with others across the state to do their part to help end and prevent homelessness. This would help solve regional and local differences in approaches to ending homelessness – a very good thing.

Homelessness is a major public health crisis, and affordable housing is healthcare. Investing in housing stability for Maine people creates a foundation to help Mainers rebuild better from the pandemic. We lacked resources before the pandemic and now we are seeing increased demand. This bill is part of a continuum of legislation that addresses housing needs in Maine, from access to safe emergency housing and supportive services, to rental assistance and housing production. These bills work in synch with each other to end and prevent homelessness.

Please support LD 1300 so that we can all work together to end and prevent homelessness in Maine.

I am happy to briefly explain the homeless councils and what is in place to tie the state together in efforts to end and prevent homelessness. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.