



Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network

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Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and distinguished members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing:

My name is Jane Makela, and I am a resident of Falmouth. I am submitting this testimony in support of LD 2 on behalf of the Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network (MUUSAN). The MUUSAN network links Maine's 26 UU congregations in working for legislation that recognizes the inherent worth and dignity of every person and promotes justice, equity, and compassion for all with whom we share this great state. We are also proud to be a partner of the Maine Council of Churches, a coalition of seven mainline Protestant denominations with 437 Maine congregations, which has also submitted testimony in support of this bill.

Before turning to the moral agenda that calls us to support this bill—that is, deep engagement with and commitment to the struggles of the poor and dispossessed—we first want to add our voices to the many housing experts and community service providers who have provided testimony explaining how *smart* this bill is:

Whereas other homelessness programs require unhoused individuals to first prove active participation in sobriety or other treatment programs, gain employment or otherwise demonstrate they've made themselves "ready" for housing, Housing First eliminates such entry barriers. Instead, it recognizes the need of the chronically homeless to access housing *immediately* if they are going to fully benefit from programs that address some of the root causes of or contributors to their homelessness. Once in safe, healthy, and stable housing, previously unhoused individuals can coordinate with care managers to identify needs and access services that will enable them to build the skills and resources to live successfully and independently.

But we are most heartened at what the Housing First programs offers to some of the most vulnerable people in our communities as human beings: We think particularly of those sleeping in the tents we see on the side of highways, those looking for safe parking lots that allow all night parking so they can sleep in their cars, and those carrying their belongings around with them each night as they look for a semi-sheltered spot to bed down in since their circumstances disqualify them for shelter services even if shelter beds were available. The impact on them of having one's own space with a door that closes for privacy and a closet that stores one's own possessions that don't need to be repacked into a backpack or shopping cart each morning, is almost inconceivable

to those of us who have never been without a home. That implicit confirmation of one's worth and dignity as a person and not simply a public nuisance or an unfortunate diagnostic category, must surely empower Housing First participants as they do the work to rebuild their lives to avoid returning to homelessness.

LD 2 will provide this experience to many more of Maine's chronically homeless, and we urge you to vote for its passage. Thank you.