

Committee on Health and Human Services
c/o Legislative Information Office
Cross Building, Room 214
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 1968: An Act to Expand Access to Mental Health and Crisis Care for Individuals in Jails and Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

We represent NASW Maine in support of LD 1968 to expand access to mental health services and crisis care for individuals in jails and individuals experiencing homelessness. Mental health disorders are highly prevalent in jails and homeless populations. In Maine, about 7020 people experiencing homelessness each year, or whom approximately 98% access the emergency shelters. A 2016 study of eighty single, chronically homeless adults reported that approximately 50% had a mental health disorder, 40% had a substance use disorder, and 35% had dual diagnoses of mental health and substance use disorders (1).

Basic human needs often take priority over seeking psychiatric care for persons experiencing homelessness (2). Access to the basic needs of adequate nutrition, water, shelter, and protection from the elements are a reality that homeless individuals encounter on a daily basis. These issues take priority over psychiatric needs, which typically are not addressed until a crisis occurs.

In her work as a crisis worker intern in southern Maine, Kerstin has found that a single person with a disability looking for an apartment in the Greater Portland area would pay a Fair Market rent of \$1,088 for a one-bedroom apartment, while receiving a monthly Supplemental Security Disability Income (SSDI) payment of \$794. There is no single housing development where a person with SSI/SSDI can afford a decent one-bedroom apartment. The last resource for individuals experiencing homelessness is the shelter, which is often the entry point into chronic homelessness. Emergency shelters are typically overcrowded and not the most cost-effective housing option for people. In 2010, a HUD-funded study of six US metropolitan communities found that shelter costs ranged between \$46 and \$123 a night, or \$1,380 and \$3,690 a month: much higher than the rental cost of one-bedroom apartment (3).

Homeless individuals do not think about their medications, but they will think about food, shelter, or heat for the night. We urge you all to vote "Yes" on LD 1968 to work towards more cost-effective, equitable and humane ways of treating vulnerable Mainers.

Respectfully submitted,

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References:

- (1) Maine State Housing Authority (June, 2017). Maine's plan to end & prevent homelessness. https://www.mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/housing-reports/2017-maine-plan-to-end-and-prevent-homelessness.pdf?sfvrsn=9f46a115_2
- (2) Paudyal V, MacLure K, Buchanan C, et al. (July, 2017). 'When you are homeless, you are not thinking about your medication, but your food, shelter or heat for the night': behavioural determinants of homeless patients' adherence to prescribed medicines. *Public Health*. 148:1-8. DOI: 10.1016/j.puhe.2017.03.002. PMID: 28404527. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28404527/>
- (3) Spellman, B., Khadduri, J., Leopold, J., Sokol, B. (2010). *Costs Associated with First-Time Homelessness for Families and Individuals*. Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development. https://www.huduser.gov/publications/pdf/Costs_Homeless.pdf