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When I think about spending a warm holiday at home with family while fellow Mainers across the state suffer in the cold and likely freeze to death, I feel sick to my stomach.

The owner of a store where I work found a homeless man sleeping on her office couch one morning this week, desperate for warm shelter - finding the door to her office suite unlocked, he had safe haven for one night. He didn't touch a single thing. He just wanted to sleep somewhere warm and comfortable. And we are supposed to have our store holiday party this evening, knowing that while we enjoy food and company, he is back out on the street, hoping to have luck with another unlocked door? This is not right. This is a failure.

I work closely with Mainers in recovery, trying to build a life without substance use. Their lives literally depend on access to stable, affordable housing and food. How can we ask people not to seek reprieve from suffering through substance use when we are not providing them a life worth experiencing? If I was confined to a life in freezing temperatures out on the streets, I too would seek an escape, wherever I could find it. We claim to want to end the opioid crisis, but we are not giving people the ability to live a life that doesn't require some form of escape.

Walking through downtown Portland and Westbrook surrounded by beautiful holiday lights and places to shop brings pain and sadness - how can we feel joy in this season when so many in our community have had joy denied to them? How can we gather with family and friends when so many in our community are prevented from doing so, and are right outside our doors, freezing to death?

By not acting on this matter, you are asking the people of Maine to willfully ignore the suffering of our neighbors in order to enjoy treasured holiday rituals. You are doing all of us a disservice.

How can we possibly delay addressing this? There are people literally fighting for their lives on the streets, and I refuse to let Maine become a place where people walk by other people in pain and pretend it's not happening. Nothing is more urgent than ensuring Mainers are safe, housed, warm, fed, and able to access the material needs that make a dignified life.

You have to come together to provide tangible solutions this week. Not in early January - now. Please do not force your constituents to freeze to death on the streets - and please do not force your constituents to pretend this isn't happening in order to enjoy their holidays. Our eyes are open to the reality of this struggle statewide, and we are not looking away.

We all deserve a safe, housed, warm holiday season. We all deserve to know that every single one of our neighbors is safe, housed, and warm too. If this doesn't happen, right now, we are not the great state we claim to be.