



Maine County Commissioners Association

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LD 2136, An Act to Provide Financial Support for Shelters for Unhoused Individuals

January 23, 2024

Chair Pierce, Chair Gere, and Members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, my name is Stephen Gorden and in addition to serving as a member of the board of commissioners for Cumberland County, I am writing today in my role as chair of the legislative policy committee of the Maine County Commissioners Association. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony to the Committee in support of LD 2136.

About MCCA. Briefly, the Maine County Commissioners Association was established in 1890 to assist Maine's county government in providing vital services to Maine citizens in a responsive, efficient, and credible manner. The Association is based in Augusta, represents all 16 of Maine's counties, and is governed by a board with representation from each participating county.

Discussion. LD 2136 provides a \$10,000,000 appropriation to the Maine State Housing Authority for 2024-2025 to provide ongoing support for the operation of homeless shelters in the State. As a general matter, our Association believes that funding for homeless shelters is an important way to ensure that individuals receive the assistance they need to be contributing and productive members of society and to stay out of the criminal justice system, and out of jail.

County jails have increasingly become the housing or treatment option of last resort for many individuals not otherwise served by society's social safety net. This is not the right direction for Maine. Incarceration harms the economic future of those who are incarcerated, and incarceration is a far more expensive way to deliver housing and treatment services – costs that ultimately are borne by Maine taxpayers.

Providing more funding for homeless shelters can help divert individuals from jails, which is better for the individuals and better for taxpayers. Yes, this funding represents an up-front investment of tax dollars. But the expenditure will ultimately save taxpayer dollars over time.

Conclusion. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill, and if you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Gorden
Chair, Legislative Policy Committee

cc: Commissioner Richard Dutremble, President, MCCA
James I. Cohen, Verrill Dana, LLP, MCCA Legislative Counsel