

Testimony of the York County Committee on Homelessness  
In support of  
*LD 2136 An Act to Provide Financial Support for Shelter for Unhoused Individual*

Senator Peirce, Representative Gere, and Honorable Members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing:

My name is Steve Buck and I am the City Manager for the City of Sanford. I am testifying on behalf of the York County Committee on Homelessness. Our Committee is comprised of representatives from fourteen community-based organizations and municipalities from across York County.<sup>1</sup> We have come together to work collaboratively to address the lack of affordable housing in York County, which is the primary cause of an explosion in the number of homeless individuals and families in our communities. We support the passage of LD 2136.

We recognize and appreciate the hard work of this Committee and the Legislature to bring a comprehensive range of solutions to the housing crisis in Maine. The investments you made in the previous year's budget along with additional measures under consideration this session have made, and will continue to make, forward progress in addressing one of the most complicated and pervasive challenges our state has faced.

Your support for innovations like the Housing First program, the Rural Affordable Housing Program, and a state investment in the Low-income Housing Tax Credit program will eventually relieve the housing supply challenges we presently face. But those innovations will take time to bear fruit. In the immediate term, there are far too many Mainers right now who lack any housing at all, and are passing the winter in dangerous encampments, tent cities, and other spaces not designed or appropriate for use as living quarters, such as storage units or vehicles. Others are living in unsafe homes due to domestic and family violence making an impossible choice between safety and homelessness.

In York County, an estimated 300 people are currently unsheltered and all existing shelter beds are currently occupied with extensive waitlists (we believe this estimate is low). People – including individuals, families, and youth – who do not have shelter or access to other essential resources are not able to pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life.

LD 2136 will provide critically needed support for emergency shelters. As you know, the Emergency Housing Relief Fund has supported 50 programs or projects across Maine, including expanding warming centers and adding capacity to existing long-term shelters. These resources without a doubt have saved the lives of many Mainers. But you have also heard that many of Maine's emergency shelters are not only not meeting the demand, but some are teetering on the brink of insolvency. Leadership at the Hope House in Bangor and Elena's Way in Portland

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<sup>1</sup> Current members include representation from Caring Unlimited, Fair Tide, Sanford Housing Authority, Seeds of Hope, York Community Service Association, York County Community Action Corp., York County Shelter Programs, and the municipalities of Biddeford, Eliot, Kennebunk, Kittery, Old Orchard Beach, Saco and Sanford.

have both testified before this committee that they are operating these shelters at a deficit, and cannot sustain operations for many more months without additional support. Similarly, in York County, support is critical for services provided by York County Shelter Programs.

We urge you to support LD 2136. It provides a life-line for Mainers with acute unmet housing and related needs. Once sheltered and with services and support, people are remarkably resilient. Stably sheltered, people can begin to take the steps necessary to work toward independence and well-being, and our communities become healthy and prosperous places for all as a result.

Thank you for your attention. Please do not hesitate to contact me for more information is needed.

Sincerely,

Steven R. Buck  
Sanford City Manager  
On behalf of the York County Committee on Homelessness

**City of Biddeford**

*Jim Bennett /s/*  
James A. Bennett  
City Manager

**City of Saco**

*John Bohenko /s/*  
John Bohenko  
City Administrator

**Sanford Housing Authority**

*Diane Small /s/*  
Diane G. Small  
Executive Director

**Town of Eliot**

*Mike Sullivan /s/*  
Michael J. Sullivan  
Town Manager

**City of Sanford**

*Steve Buck /s/*  
Steven R. Buck  
Sanford City Manager

**Seeds of Hope**

*Vassie Folwer /s/*  
Vassie Fowler  
Executive Director

**Town of Kennebunk**

*Heather Balser /s/*  
Heather Balser  
Town Manager

**Caring Unlimited**

*Susan Giambalvo /s/*  
Susan Giambalvo, LCSW  
Executive Director

**York Community Service Association**

*Michelle Surdoval /s/*  
Michelle Surdoval  
Executive Director

**Town of Kittery**

*Kendra Amaral /s/*  
Kendra Amaral  
Town Manager

**Fair Tide**

*Emily Flinkstrom /s/*  
Emily Flinkstrom, MSW  
Executive Director

**York County Community  
Action Corporation**

*Carter Friend /s/*  
Carter Friend, CEO

**Town of Old Orchard Beach**

*Diana Asanza /s/*  
Diana H. Asanza  
Town Manager

**York County Shelter  
Programs**

*Megan Gean-Gendron /s/*  
Megan Gean-Gendron  
Executive Director