



Testimony in Support of LD 2136
An Act to Provide Financial Support for Shelters for Unhoused Individuals

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and distinguished members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, I am Westbrook Mayor Michael Foley testifying on behalf of the Maine Mayors Coalition in support of Representative Mastraccio's bill, LD 2136, An Act to Provide Financial Support for Shelters for Unhoused Individuals.

The Maine Mayors Coalition is a nonpartisan group representing the mayors of nine Maine communities – Auburn, Biddeford, Lewiston, Portland, Rockland, Saco, Sanford, South Portland, Waterville and Westbrook – and more than 265,000 residents. The Coalition advocates on behalf of our citizens and municipalities for policies that recognize the vital services Maine cities provide and the positive impact Maine cities have on our state. The Coalition seeks to work in partnership with state and federal elected officials to meet the needs of Maine people.

Maine's housing crisis continues to directly impact each of our cities and is an issue of highest priority for our Coalition. Every day we see the human and economic consequences that come from the lack of housing supply and the rising costs of homes and rents.

As you're well aware, our housing crisis has brought with it an increase in homelessness. Our unhoused populations include families who are not able to afford the rising costs of rents; individuals who suffer with mental health and substance use issues; and individuals and families who are seeking asylum here in Maine. And, they all need shelter now.

Cities of all sizes are seeing their homeless populations increase. In the sponsor's home city of Sanford, 155 people were living on the streets and in encampments last week. That number is growing every day while only 44 shelter beds are available in the Sanford area. Its School Department has seen a disturbing increase in the number of unhoused students from 27 in 2019-2020 to 131 this school year.

Though unhoused populations may be larger in our cities, homelessness is not unique to us. Sadly, communities all across the state are experiencing it as well.

As mayors, our most immediate concerns and constant struggles are finding housing for people who need it now and providing them with essential support. We are grateful to Governor Mills and the Maine Legislature for the financial support included in recent budgets and legislation.

But homelessness continues to be a serious and dangerous issue that we expect will only get worse. We need additional resources to address homelessness. Authorizing ongoing funding for homeless shelters, as proposed in LD 2136, will provide warm accommodations, and perhaps a sense of hope, to unhoused people at a time when they are most in need. We urge you to support this legislation.

We know you are continuing to work on longer term solutions to address our housing crisis, and we remain ready to lend our support to your efforts. Thank you, again.

Supported by Mitchell Tardy Jackson Government Affairs, 104 Sewall Street, Augusta, ME 04330, 207-622-1365