

Michael Beck
Bangor
LD 2138

Honorable Members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing,

My name is Michael Beck and I am a resident of Bangor. I urge you to support LD 2138 and ask for your committee to recommend to the Maine Legislature that the bill ought to pass. We must increase the overnight bed rate of reimbursement for low-barrier shelters to \$90 per night, as the bill prescribes.

Low-barrier shelters offer more than just a roof over someone's head. They provide access to critical services, build strong community connections, and empower individuals to rebuild their lives. Investing in these shelters is not merely a budgetary allocation; it is an investment in the dignity, health, and well-being of our fellow Mainers. Today, that investment is woefully short of what is required.

The Hope House, our low-barrier shelter in Bangor, Maine, is under threat of closure due to a lack of funding. Last year, the Hope House ran a deficit of more than \$600,000. This year the Hope House is projected to lose more than \$800,000. Because of this, PCHC has been looking for new ownership to take over the facility. If they are unable to find another organization to take it on, PCHC has signaled that they will close the shelter. This would be catastrophic. Not only for Bangor, but for the communities across Maine that have made Bangor their de facto homelessness response system by regularly sending their unsheltered residents to the Hope House.

This is more than a Hope House issue. Low-barrier shelters across Maine are collectively in the red to the tune of over \$4 million dollars annually now. The Hope House is simply the canary in the coal mine. The first domino to fall. If the Hope House and other low-barrier shelters in Maine close, there will be a ripple effect of negative consequences.

The immediate consequence of not passing LD 2138 would be a catastrophic shortage of beds for Maine's most vulnerable citizens. Without Hope House and other low-barrier shelters, more individuals experiencing homelessness would be forced to sleep on the streets, in parks, or cars, exposing them to harsh weather, increased health risks, and potential violence.

Overburdened existing shelters would face a surge in demand, leading to overcrowding, longer wait times, and compromised sanitation. This would put additional pressure on already stretched-thin emergency services, social workers, and healthcare providers. Increased hospitalizations and mental health crises would likely follow, leading to higher costs for everyone. Not passing this bill will cost the state and its communities more than the cost of increasing the funding.

Visible homelessness can negatively impact the social fabric of our communities. Deterred tourism, decreased property values, and a general sense of unease are all potential consequences. We must remember that homelessness is not simply a housing issue; it's a symptom of deeper societal problems that we can't afford to ignore.

LD 2138 is not just about numbers on a spreadsheet; it's about investing in the lives of our fellow Mainers. It's about providing a safe space, a warm meal, and offering the first steps for people to rebuild their lives. Passing this bill is not just the right thing to do; it's also the fiscally responsible choice in the long run by preventing the downstream costs of unsheltered homelessness. Not passing this bill will cost the state and its communities far more tomorrow than the cost of increasing the funding today.

I urge you to recommend LD 2138 Ought to Pass. Let's continue to build a Maine where everyone, regardless of circumstance, has access to the basic necessities of life and the opportunity for a brighter future.

Respectfully,
Michael Beck of Bangor