

Gabrielle Wiley
Bangor
LD 2138

Good afternoon,

My name is Gabrielle Wiley, and I'm a resident of Bangor, Maine, where I've lived for the past five years and worked at Acadia Hospital, while studying Social Work at the University of Maine. I'm here to ask that you support LD 2138.

My home is downtown, and I live next to a park where at any time of year it is expected to find our unhoused neighbors. If they're lucky they are camped out in tents, and if they're unlucky they might have a blanket or a tarp. Sometimes they are in small groups or they may be single individuals. Some are from Bangor, and some are from our surrounding communities, coming to Bangor for the social services offered by DHHS, our hospitals, and nonprofit agencies.

Last fall, following the clearance of Camp Hope, a homeless encampment located next to PCHC's Hope House, I came home from work to find my mom talking to a gant and slight man huddled under blankets sitting on our front steps. She had brought him coffee and food, and was listening to his story.

We spent that evening listening to him and trying to find him a safe place to sleep. He had been staying at Camp Hope until it was cleared a few days prior, and because of the threat of police at the camp he left for various parks around the city. The previous night he was assaulted while trying to sleep in the park next to my house. He had a black eye and he had lost several teeth. He explained to us that he was waiting for a bed at one of the various shelters in town, but they were all not only at capacity, but with waiting lists that had dozens of names on them. He told us that he was #28 at the Hope House, and #27 at the Bangor Homeless Shelter. With no other options, we gave him a ride back to Camp Hope for him to stay with a friend who had a tent. This is not an unusual story, I frequently field similar calls at my work from our unhoused community members, desperate to find a warm place to sleep that night.

In the months since then, we've found out that the Hope House is at risk of closing due to its managing organization, PCHC, not being able to maintain the costs of running. Bangor, as part of Northern Maine is considered THE location for social services, yet we are not receiving the State or Federal support we need to help everyone who needs it. Without emergency shelter folks are forced to sleep outside, like the young man I found on my front steps. Yet the alternative, these homeless encampments found not just in Bangor but around the entire state are considered a public health and safety risk for our communities.

Emergency shelters such as the Hope House need our support, not only for the services that they provide our unhoused neighbors but also for how they provide much needed stability to those suffering from unstable housing, substance use disorder, and abuse. They need to be expanded, at whatever cost, not forced to close due to lack of financial support.

Thank you for your time and for prioritizing the \$5 million funding for the shelter system last year and Site-based Housing First legislation incorporated in the Governor's Supplemental budget. Please consider providing significant funding for the Bangor Region so that we can better meet the needs of ALL of our community members - unhoused and housed alike.