

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, ESQ.

LD 2146 – Ought to Pass

**An Act to Prohibit Certain Municipalities from
Adopting Moratoria on Emergency Shelters**

Joint Standing Committee on
State and Local Government

January 30, 2024

Senator Nagle, Representative Stover and members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, greetings. My name is Michael Kebede, and I am Policy Counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, we urge you to support LD 2146.

Housing—let alone shelter—is a human right, and cities in Maine ought not be allowed to deprive their residents of this right by prohibiting emergency shelters. If enacted, this bill would prohibit municipalities with populations exceeding 30,000 people (i.e., Portland, Bangor, and Lewiston) from adopting moratoria on the establishment of emergency shelters that provide temporary shelter for persons experiencing homelessness. This change in law is urgently needed.

According to Maine Housing, homelessness in Maine has more than doubled in the past decade, from 1,200 people in 2014 to 4,258 people in 2023.¹ Add to this, the Press Herald reported last month that “Maine’s privately run homeless shelters are facing dire funding challenges and at least one is in danger of closing.”² Experts agree that more is needed from all government authorities.³ Maine lacks enough shelters, and a shelter shortage increases burdens for jails and prisons, law enforcement agencies, and hospitals. Most concerning, a lack of shelters could

¹ 2023 Point in Time Count, MaineHousing, Maine State Housing Authority, *available at* https://www.mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/housing-reports/2023-point-in-time.pdf?sfvrsn=e1c28015_5

² Rachel Ohm, *Maine homeless shelters warn of financial crisis Six shelters around the state are facing a collective shortfall of about \$4.1 million and at least one is in danger of closing*, Press Herald, Dec. 6, 2023, *available at* <https://www.pressherald.com/2023/12/05/homeless-shelters-in-maine-face-dire-funding-challenges/>

³ *Id.*

mean unconstitutional deprivations of civil rights and civil liberties, such as when officials enforce camping bans despite the lack of alternatives to sleeping outside.

This bill promises to remove one barrier to building shelters. We urge you to vote *ought to pass*.