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Mid-Maine
Homeless Shelter
& Services

Hope Starts Here
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MID-MAINE HOMELESS SHELTER & SERVICES

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Dear Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

RE: LD2214 Supplemental Budget, Emergency Housing Provisions, Section HH

My name is Dr. Katie Spencer White and I am the president and CEO of Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter & Services in Waterville. We are one of the most comprehensive homeless services providers in the state and our shelter is one of only four low-barrier shelters that serves people with addiction, mental illness, and a record of criminal convictions, and the only one between Portland and Bangor. You will hear from my shelter colleagues including Lori Dwyer of PCHC, which operates Hope House, and I cosign everything she will share with you about the urgent need to sustain Maine's low-barrier shelters. I want you to know that on Tuesday evening this week, the city of Waterville allocated \$200,000 of their city ARPA funding – 11% of the total – to sustain our low-barrier emergency shelter. It is a bridge to keep us viable until state relief arrives. **If you do not approve this funding request**, however, it will be a bridge to nowhere and **we will close by year's end**. If we hope to avoid the catastrophe seen in places like California and Portland, Oregon, we must act now.

But that is not why I am speaking with you today. While emergency shelter is the largest of our programs, it serves a targeted population. These are frequent users of expensive systems of care, like emergency rooms, and the prison system. It is right to focus resources here.

And yet must not forget that the majority of people who experience homelessness do not fall within these categories. In fact, according to our 2023 Maine Point In Time count of people experiencing homelessness, 55% of households that experienced homelessness on a single night in January 2023 had a child under the age of 18, and children made up 30% of the total population. As a mom of five kids who early on had to rely on welfare and the generosity of many, I know firsthand the struggle of raising a young family when times are hard. As a researcher and a service provider, I know these households are best served by programs that provide an immediate offramp from a housing crisis and return families with all alacrity to permanent stable housing.

You have in the supplemental budget funding that would sustain one of our key interventions for addressing the thousands of people who need less intense interventions than shelter to end their

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housing emergency. The program is called Rapid Rehousing and it has been a massive success for us in Kennebec County. We launched the program in 2023 and have rehoused almost 40 households using tried and true strategies like case management and discreet payments to secure units while inspections were conducted, assist landlords with minor repairs so apartments can accept a voucher, and contribute to first and last month's rent which few of our clients could afford on their own.

What makes RRH unique is that it recognizes that the most important resource we have in ending the state's housing crisis is making the best use of the housing we've already got. Rather than seeing landlords as the problem, we see them as the solution. Landlords want to rent to our clients, but we need our programs and our clients to make good business sense. **Engaging with landlords and partnering with them to ensure a successful tenancy is the secret sauce to this program and it is paying dividends.**

As a mother of four sons who knows how intensely they play, one of my favorite stories is of Carmen and her two boys who were on the path to eviction. Her landlord reached out to us to ask for our help because tenants who are stressed sometimes don't take calls. The issue was Carmen's two sons who liked to play basketball. Unfortunately, they played late at night. Carmen wasn't aware this was causing a nuisance and could lead to eviction. We helped rehabilitate that relationship and Carmen and her boys remain happy in their home.

Some cases are more complex. Consider Anna who was two weeks from eviction in Somerset County due to a rent increase she could not afford. Our Rapid Rehousing team worked with her to locate a new unit and pay the security deposit. Because she was working and receiving disability income, she was not eligible for a voucher; instead, Rapid Rehousing subsidized her rent for four months while her new case manager helped her develop and execute a housing stability plan which included accessing universal benefits and career counseling that helped her secure a better paying job that enabled her to pay her rent after those first four months.

Some will say these stories are not ordinary, but we see them unfold every day. This is Maine and this is the way life should be.

Few programs are tailor-made to meet the unique needs of children and their families. This is one of them. We know that what we decide to do today not only informs what happens over the next few days or weeks, it has a generational impact when children are involved. Carmen and Anna's kids never experienced the trauma and stigma of homelessness. Our kids deserve to be raised in a home, not a homeless shelter. We hope you will agree and will vote to approve this funding.

Yours in partnership,



Dr. Katie Spencer White
CEO, Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter & Services

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