

Testimony of York County Shelter Programs

In support of

LD 2214 "An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025"

Senator Hamper, Representative Rotundo, and the distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs:

My name is Megan Gean-Gendron and I am the Executive Director of York County Shelter Programs – a 45-year old comprehensive homelessness prevention agency and home to York County's only adult and family shelter.

I am writing today in support of LD 2214 and in particular the support included for emergency housing programs and affordable housing production.

Last year the legislature approved emergency housing allocations that made it possible to launch multiple warming centers across the state, provided much needed assistance to shelters in order to provide diversion or problem solving services to Mainers most at risk of homelessness, and provided funds for shelters to provide *Temporary Rapid Re-Housing* support enabling us to provide support to individuals and families coming out of shelters or diversionary programs so that we could get them into permanent housing. This support was critical and the fact that shelter providers could quickly access these funds in order to help individuals and families, made these programs some of the best solutions to more quickly resolve homelessness or the very certain risk of homelessness for countless Mainers.

In York County, we have a low estimate of 300 people currently unsheltered while all existing shelter beds are currently full. People – including individuals, families, and youth – who do not have shelter or access to other essential resources are not able to pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life. Without adequate shelter and in the daily grind to simply survive, it is nearly impossible for folks to focus on anything but surviving one hour at a time. It is harder to gain or maintain employment – where would you shower before work? Where will your phone calls come into without an ability to charge your phone, if you even have one? How do you get enough sleep when you are sleeping in a tent or a car when it is 15' outside? How do you cook a meal for your child while living in a car or tent? What would you say to your child who is crying that they are too cold? The simple fact that anywhere in this great state we have people living outside should be cause for panic. But we have hundreds, at least. This is a crisis. We do not have enough shelter beds in this state and even if there was an opportunity to expand those beds to get folks off the streets, our shelters are on the brink of closure because they are funded at 35% of what it costs to operate at current capacity.

The Emergency Housing Funds have enabled shelter providers to ensure that, even when our shelters at at capacity, we can help find a solution for the countless individuals and families seeking shelter – including veterans who've honorably served this country, a parent with children fleeing a domestic violence situation, and elderly individuals who can simply no longer afford housing, their medications, and food. Because of these funds, hundreds of Main residents have been kept out of tents and in safer conditions while awaiting shelter beds and eventually permanent housing.

York County Shelter Programs currently has multiple families in motels awaiting beds at our family shelter. I can say with certainty that dozens of families, just within our York County service umbrella, would be out on the streets of Maine this winter if not for these critical funds that have enabled shelters to take care of

Maine's most vulnerable residents. The warming center that we launched this year – due to the funding through emergency housing approved by the legislature last year. Our warming center remains at capacity – 44 individuals – plus another 30 that come in throughout the day for meals throughout the day. That is nearly 75 individuals in Sanford alone that have had a chance not to die sleeping outside during a Maine winter.

Please think of all of the Mainers statewide when you are considering this funding. This funding has helped to keep them alive and is critical.

Thank you for your time and consideration and for your service to Maine.

Respectfully submitted,

Megan Gean-Gendron