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LD 698

I rise today in modest support of LD 698.

I rise with the recognition that emergency shelters are not the solution to homelessness. They are not the answer. They are warehouses. And yet, warehouses we cannot do without because they, like warming Centers have become the SafetyNet.

As someone who has worked in crisis response and community integration within the State of Maine for many a day, I have seen firsthand the necessity of these temporary shelters. These facilities - institutions; though not ideal, serve as lifelines for individuals facing homelessness. They provide immediate safety, shelter, and basic services for people who are at their most vulnerable. But I have also seen, through my years of outreach work, how quickly the cycle of homelessness can return, for some, even after temporary stabilization. Shelters, however well-intentioned, do not address the root causes of homelessness or create lasting solutions. They are a warehouse for people in crisis, and while necessary, they are not the end goal. Stable housing with solid supports – is.

I have also worked with the Maine Continuum of Care and other local services for the homeless and those in need, where I have seen the positive impact of well-run emergency shelters. These are staffed by compassionate and dedicated individuals who do everything they can to provide care, stability, and support, i have been one! But the reality is, these efforts are expensive, and they cannot replace the long-term solutions we so desperately need – Stable housing with solid supports!

LD 698 acknowledges what we all know to be true: that emergency shelters are expensive to operate, that the need far outpaces the supply, and that even as we invest in long-term housing solutions, people will continue to fall through the cracks. We must ensure that, when they do, there is a safe place to land.

I support this bill, but I do so with the full awareness that it is not the solution. It is a response. A response to crisis, to human suffering, to the reality that we, as a society, have yet to do enough upstream to prevent the need for these warehouses in the first place.

As someone who has lived through the experience of homelessness, I understand how shelters can serve as a temporary reprieve, but they are often not the path to a full and lasting solution. Our goal must always be to create housing stability, supportive services, and the opportunity for individuals to regain their autonomy and dignity.

So yes, let us pass LD 698. But let us also commit to the work beyond it. The work of making these emergency measures less necessary. The work of housing, of stability, of recovery - of dignity. The work of ensuring that, one day, we will not need warehouses at all.

Thank you.

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