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I would like to submit written testimony for consideration for the committee on homelessness and shelter funding. My name is Suzanne Gunston and I have more than 30 years of experience with the development and provision of homeless services. I am writing to provide input on the impact that shelter programs have in maintaining public health in our communities.

In 2003, I was hired by Maine CDC to address an uncontrolled outbreak of tuberculosis among homeless residents of Portland Maine. Containing the outbreak took more than two years and involved a partnership between federal CDC, Maine CDC, the Portland Health Department, Maine Medical Center and multiple city-wide homeless service providers. The fiscal cost of containing the outbreak was enormous. Shelters not only save lives by feeding and housing at-risk populations; they are an entry point to treatment for people struggling with substance use disorder. Tuberculosis is resurging in the USA and particularly in Maine. TB is an airborne bacterial infection that is transmitted in settings malnutrition, homelessness and poverty. The disease has a long incubation period and may simmer for years before exploding in an outbreak of active disease that may have already infected hundreds of people. Shelters play a crucial role in screening for TB and helping to locate and treat infected individuals before the infection is transmitted to the wider community. An investment in shelter services is not only a humanitarian imperative but also a cost-saving measure that will help to ensure the health of our State.  
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