

Good afternoon, Chair Curry and Chair Gere, and Members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee,

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Emergency Shelter Assessment and Response Team (ESART), consisting of sixteen members, including service providers, advocates, and local and state officials, united in addressing the need for adequate emergency shelter capacity in Portland through data-driven strategic planning, action, and advocacy. We aim to ensure everyone in our community can access a safe shelter with resources to escape homelessness.

ESART strongly supports LD 698, An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine, because Maine's homelessness response system is in crisis, with stagnant funding and record-high rates of homeless individuals utilizing shelters. Our emergency shelters are running on budget deficits that are not sustainable.

MaineHousing recently released a Shelter Cost Study indicating that the average shelter bed costs about \$102 each night. The ESHAP shelter operating funding subsidizes \$7.16 per bed, per night, leaving shelters to pick up the remaining \$95. This bill would raise the state's subsidy to \$19 per bed, per night, reducing financial strains on shelters. This incremental increase in shelter operations funding could prevent them from closing or reducing the beds they can provide.

[According to the Urban Institute](#), people experiencing unsheltered homelessness struggle with accessing homeless assistance programs and experience higher health complications, such as physical illness, mental illness, substance use disorder, trauma, and even death compared to sheltered homeless individuals. Without this critical funding, many more shelters may be forced to close, leaving many more people in need without proper shelter and exposed to severe elements. Maine's funding for emergency shelter operations has not changed in 2016. Since then, the number of emergency shelter beds has increased, leaving shelters to scramble to find the appropriate funding to meet high demands. Due to Maine's housing crisis, the average length of time that someone stays at a shelter has increased due to frozen Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) and long waiting times for permanent Supportive Housing and BRAP.

Maine's homeless response system is already overburdened. LD 698 would help alleviate some of the operating costs that shelters face. ESART urges you to pass this legislation because we cannot afford to close shelters, have more people in our homeless system, or have people go unsheltered.

Thank you.