

State of Maine - 132nd Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development
Testimony of Lily Lynch on behalf of The Opportunity Alliance (South Portland, Maine)
March 18, 2025

Supporting:
LD698, "An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine"

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development:

My name is Lily Lynch, I am testifying on behalf of The Opportunity Alliance and my community in support of this legislation. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of LD698, An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine.

At The Opportunity Alliance, our 450 employees across dozens of programs work with more than 24,000 low-income Mainers each year to keep them safe and healthy and help them thrive. Each year TOA programs such as Mobile Crisis Unit, Broadway Crossings Adult Crisis Stabilization Unit, Project for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH), Homeless Youth Services, and Cumberland County Homeless Prevention Program provide targeted interventions for individuals and families experiencing housing instability. Given the current housing crisis, we're also seeing housing instability impact clients within many of our other programs, such as Head Start, WIC, and case management.

The role of housing as a social determinant of health is well established, and the severe lack of housing in Maine has exacerbated the mental health crisis. Unstable housing situations or lack of shelter make it impossible for individuals to maintain jobs, stay engaged in school, and be connected members of their community. Research shows that homelessness is costly for communities and systems of care, as individuals who are unsheltered are more likely to utilize emergency rooms and public safety and crisis response services.

Shelters provide an important opportunity for individuals and families to stabilize a crisis and seek additional support. Shelters also provide a critical touchpoint where case managers and service providers can reach individuals and families and build important relationships. When individuals or families are unhoused and transient, gains made in finding housing, mental health and substance use support, education, and access to basic needs can be set back days, weeks, or even months.

Collaboration is a cornerstone of TOA's success; programs work in partnership with the client(s), community organizations, and service providers, including many shelters across the state. If shelters were to close, we believe it would be detrimental to the people we serve and residents across Maine.

Please vote Ought to Pass on LD698, so Maine's social service agencies can focus on our mission and build a community in which all people in Maine have access to high-quality

childcare and early childhood education programs, safe and stable housing, effective and compassionate mental health and substance use treatment, and basic needs supports.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lily Lynch

The Opportunity Alliance

Lily Lynch
The Opportunity Alliance
LD 698

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Lily Lynch
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