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LD 698

I appreciate this opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 698, a bill to increase state friending to emergency shelters. I have volunteered at the Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter And Services agency and currently serve on its Board of Directors. Having stated this, the perspective I offer in this letter is that of a clinical social worker who recently retired after nearly 38 years of service in a health care setting. When I started my career on the inpatient mental health and/or substance use disorder units, it was very rare that we discharged a patient to a homeless shelter. In fact, we almost considered it a failure on our part if this occurred. Unfortunately, during my last few years at the hospital, we needed to take that route several times per year. One critical reason for these outcomes was the lack of affordable housing. After extensive searches for alternatives, discharge of the patient to a homeless shelter became the only viable option. If it were not for shelter across Maine, already lengthy, expensive, and no longer medically necessary hospital stays would be extended. Tying up a bed in this way would often delay admission of other patients waiting in the medical center's Emergency Department.

The above encapsulates one of the many ways homeless shelters serve our communities.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.