

To Joint Select Committee on State and Local Government by Christopher St.John, Brunswick,
cstj@gwi.net

Testimony Regarding

LD 731 An Act to Prohibit Municipalities from Barring the Creation of Homeless Shelters,
March 19, 2025

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury and members of the Committee on State and Local Government:

I am a resident of Brunswick and have been a member of the Southern Midcoast Housing Collaborative and the Tedford Housing Capital Campaign committee. I offer these remarks with the benefit of those experiences, but only on my own behalf.

I am grateful for all the work accomplished in each of the last several legislatures, making more progress to invest in housing and shelters than has been done over my lifetime of observing Maine state government. And I know you know how much more there is to be done.

I moved to Brunswick from Gardiner in 2011 and became interested in how and why Brunswick had so many fewer units of publicly supported affordable housing than the neighboring community of Bath. I learned that history plays a part, and that getting affordable housing built requires concerted combined efforts of town or city government, employers, and community organizations. Fortunately in recent years Brunswick Town Council has recognized the need and appointed first an ad hoc committee and now permanent committee , and allocated a modest affordable housing fund for projects addressing this great need.

In the mid 1980s Brunswick's town general assistance administrator saw the need for an emergency shelter and worked with the Brunswick Area Council of Churches to get one started, initially in a building that was donated by one of the downtown churches that was building a new church. When the original building was no longer adequate, the Board worked with the Brunswick Housing Authority to secure a larger old apartment building for a shelter for adults. A few years later again Brunswick Housing Authority helped secure another old apartment house to use as an emergency shelter for six families. On each occasion there was some concern expressed by neighbors of the new locations, but in each case the Housing Authority was able to demonstrate that the facilities would not disturb the neighborhoods.

After a dozen years these two locations were not sufficient to meet the daily needs, and Tedford Housing proposed to build a new combined larger facility, but ran into fiercer community opposition even though they had been operating in the same neighborhoods without ill effects for many years. The town council determined that they had no definition of an emergency shelter in their ordinances and passed a moratorium on any new shelter until new zoning definitions and locations could be approved. Ultimately Tedford was able to locate its new expanded shelter with 64 beds under the new ordinance, but the delay caused the project to double in cost.

I support the proposed bill to assure that no town can obstruct efforts to provide shelter for everyone.

