



Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development: My name is Cate Blackford and I am the public policy director for the Maine People's Alliance.

Maine People's Alliance is Maine's largest community action organization with 32,000 members from Kittery to Fort Kent. I am here today to speak in support of LD 698.

We appreciate the funding recommendations this committee made to AFA to address Maine's housing crisis. We believe that LD 698 builds on that foundation, targeting an underserved sector of our state response. Maine's funding for emergency shelter beds has not changed since 2016. This is despite the additional shelter capacity added and the significantly longer stays by Mainers in shelters as people struggle to find affordable places to move into. The average length of a shelter stay has increased by nearly 60% since 2017. This bill would provide much needed resources for the individuals and families facing the worst part of the housing crisis, having nowhere else to go.

As you heard from them directly, Maine's emergency shelters have already stitched together every available resource and layered them to make it possible to keep their doors open. They are running unsustainable deficits. Without additional state support, they will be unable to serve the needs of their communities.

Emergency shelters play a critical role in easing the pain and harm of our housing crisis. People with shelter access are better able to access homeless assistance programs and experience lower levels of physical illness, mental illness, substance use disorder, trauma, and death compared to unsheltered homeless individuals. As Maine works to address the root causes of homelessness, we cannot leave the most impacted without support. Last session's Joint Select Committee on Housing made critical investments in housing first, emergency rental assistance, and other homelessness prevention measures. As you carry that work forward, the funding in LD 698 is an essential ingredient.

I thank you all for the serious, thoughtful approach you are bringing to the complexity of the housing crisis and your reflections upon the deeply entrenched policies and beliefs that have led us to where we are today. This committee's work is essential, to create a new housing system in Maine, where everyone has a safe, decent place to call home, that

they can afford, in the community where they have ties. We look forward to supporting you in that work.

Given the current revenue projections and this committee's discussions about the Governor's proposed spending and cuts for the biennial budget, I would also urge you all to work with your colleagues on the Taxation Committee to find new revenue, rather than make hard tradeoffs. There are multiple opportunities to raise revenue from those that benefit the most in our current economic system to support these investments. Our current tax system benefits the wealthy far more than those with modest means. This exacerbates Maine's housing crisis by reducing the revenue available to address its harms and reducing the resources low and middle income Mainers have to afford a safe, decent place to call home.

Thank you again for your hard work on this critical issue and for the opportunity to speak with you today. I urge you to support this bill. I am happy to take any questions.