

Good after Senator Curry, Representative Gere and distinguished members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee. I am Colleen Madigan and I live in Waterville. I am a former member of the Maine House of Representative and the current Director of Clinical Programs at Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter. I am writing today in support of LD 698- An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelter in Maine. As many of you know me, you may be aware of my work and advocacy in my capacity as a clinical social worker and in my legislative work regarding issues of homelessness, behavioral health and substance use disorder. These issues remain important to me, and I think I have some things to add about this important bill.

I understand the necessity to expedite the production of affordable housing units. Certainly the problems faced by people who are unhoused will not be changed until there are enough places for them to live. This is the challenge your committee faces. I recognize that emergency shelters are not permanent places to live. But I see this as a “both and” rather than an “either or” issue. The Mid-Maine Homeless shelter is in Waterville, a service center community. We have people coming from Waterville and all the surrounding communities seeking our services because of the lack of housing. We all recognize it is going to take a while to build more housing. It took us years to get to this point and this won't be solved overnight or next year, or the next. In the meantime, people facing multiple challenges, including being unhoused, will continue to need the services of places like the Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter. So, we need to do all we can to create more housing units **and** support those who are unhoused. They aren't going anywhere.

I would like to explain to you how things have changed. I recently started working at the Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter. I worked here briefly about 10 years ago. Things have changed a lot. The length of stay in the shelter has increased. This is due to the lack of affordable apartments. In addition, we are seeing more elderly or disabled people with medical needs that cannot find housing they can afford. So, they wind up in a shelter. Sometimes they are even discharged from a hospital to a shelter. They often need home health care or after-care of some kind. Low barrier shelters like the Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter take in people with these challenges and other struggles such as substance use disorder or behavioral health disorders. It's a bigger job than it used to be. We are trying to meet the needs of people in new ways while we wait for housing to be built. But we can't do it alone. We need the Legislature to help us.

I know you have a tough job here. Perhaps I know that better than most. I am asking you to recognize the importance of funding homeless shelters because they are the

front lines in addressing the opiate epidemic, seniors not able to age in place, lack of behavioral health services, etc. Please support LD 698. Thank you.

Colleen M. Madigan, LCSW

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