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President of the Senate

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

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Testimony in Support of LD 698
LD 698, An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine
Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development
March 18, 2025

Hello Senator Curry, Representative Gere and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Mattie Daughtry. I serve as President of the Maine Senate and I proudly represent Senate District 23, which includes Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island and part of Yarmouth. I am honored to be a co-sponsor of LD 698, “An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine.” This legislation is not only timely but essential as we face a deepening crisis of homelessness in our state.

Bipartisan efforts in the previous legislative sessions have made significant strides toward addressing our housing inventory shortfall, yet we must acknowledge that the number of Mainers experiencing homelessness has increased at an alarming rate. Emergency shelters are crucial in mitigating the catastrophic consequences of this unsheltered homelessness for both individuals and communities. They provide not just a temporary refuge, but also vital support services that help our most vulnerable citizens regain stability.

As we look to sustain our shelter network, it is critical to recognize the context of the funding challenges we currently face. The operating subsidy for our shelters has remained flat since 2016, despite the fact that the demand for shelter resources has surged. The effects of high inflation have further diminished the purchasing power of this funding, resulting in a significant gap between the public need and the resources available.

While one-time infusions of funds from the American Rescue Plan Act have temporarily stabilized shelter finances, we cannot rely on these stopgap measures indefinitely. Without consistent and increased funding in 2024, many shelters were preparing to reduce services, which would have devastating consequences for the individuals and families who depend on them.

Our current shelter network is under unprecedented strain, with the average length of stay in shelters increasing by 59% since 2017. I fear that this will only continue to rise, and rise dramatically in the coming years, particularly if we do have to impose General Assistance cuts in the budget, which will inevitably mean more people who were housed will find themselves on the streets and in need of shelter.

The proposal outlined in LD 698 aims to sustain the 1,194 beds currently available in our shelters. While we recognize that new construction is warranted to address the broader housing

crisis - in fact, I have a bill this session to support funding for more workforce housing, which will come before this committee in the coming weeks, we must understand that ending homelessness requires work and investment at every phase of the housing continuum. This bill focuses on maintaining the existing infrastructure that is currently saving lives. Folks relying on shelters in Maine including families, unaccompanied youth, older Mainers with chronic health needs and individuals with mental health or substance use challenges. This range of individuals and diversity of needs highlights the necessity of a robust and varied shelter system.

I urge this committee to take swift action on LD 698. Maine cannot afford to lose any of our emergency shelters. We owe it to our communities and to our fellow Mainers to ensure that everyone has a safe place to call home, especially in these challenging times.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to addressing homelessness in our state, and I want to thank the bill sponsor for introducing this important bill. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.