



CITY OF BANGOR

Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

Testimony on LD 731 – An Act to Prohibit Municipalities from Barring the Creation of Homeless Shelters

March 19, 2025

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government. I am Deborah Laurie, City Manager of the City of Bangor, and on behalf of the Bangor City Council I am providing testimony in support of LD 731, “An Act to Prohibit Municipalities from Barring the Creation of Homeless Shelters.”

Though the state continues to work toward real-time and accurate access to data on people experiencing homelessness in Maine, the City of Bangor understands the following two things about homelessness in Maine to be true: the state is lacking in total available emergency shelter beds to meet the current need, and people experiencing homelessness are generally best served when they can remain close to the communities they call home as they access services.

For many Mainers experiencing homelessness, accessing homeless services can be difficult, if not impossible. If you do not live in the areas where one of Maine’s emergency shelters exist, you are likely forced to leave your community and support system in search of a safe, warm place to sleep and find help. Further, access to emergency shelters helps to prevent people who are experiencing homelessness from facing unsheltered homelessness and mitigates the establishment of encampments. Maine’s current emergency shelter landscape falls short of appropriate geographic coverage to adequately meet the demand for shelter beds in need.

One of the foundations of our state’s system of government is local control, often referred to as “home rule.” Local control over our zoning and ordinances is a critical aspect of managing land use and ensuring community needs are met. Therefore, we would suggest an amendment to this bill to allow a period of time for municipalities to adopt the appropriate regulations to identify appropriate zoning and the development of appropriate ordinances related to the location and operation of homeless shelters. Passage of LD 731, with an amendment, does not guarantee that every Maine community that needs an emergency shelter will get one, but it does mean that municipalities can establish the appropriate guidance to allow for the creation of additional shelters where they are needed.

Homelessness remains one of the most pressing and complex challenges we face and every community needs to have access to any and all available solutions to help bring people inside. Thank you for your consideration, and please do not hesitate to reach out with questions.

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