



March 23, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, my name is John Hennessy, and I am the Public Policy Director for the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. We are comprised of more than 10,000 people in 57 churches, 17 summer chapels, and various ministries across Maine. Congregations across The Episcopal Church have long supported efforts to help people who are homeless, whether they are seeking a place to stay, a nourishing meal, or a friendly conversation.

The diocese supports LD 698, **An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine**, due to our long-standing commitment to the Gospel and the economically poor. Individuals and families require shelter due to various individual and systemic socio-economic issues. Currently, Maine is experiencing a housing crisis, and shelters provide initial emergency care and support, such as emergency rooms in our healthcare system. Our churches recognize that individuals and families may resort to taking to the streets or encampments without access to fiscally viable shelters. Religious leaders stood in solidarity with unhoused families and individuals when Portland cleared encampments last year, a heartbreaking situation and one that we do not want to see repeated.

Episcopalians' baptismal covenant calls on us as Christians "to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being." That commitment underpins much of the church's work with the homeless,

You have now heard and read that the fiscal reality of state funding for emergency shelter operations has not increased since 2016. This appropriation request will raise the state's financial commitment from \$7 per bed per night to \$19 per night. Indeed, it is not a significant increase, but it could make a difference in maintaining Maine's 41 ESHAP-funded homeless shelters, which are already at full capacity. Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) are currently frozen, and there are long waiting lists for Permanent Supportive Housing and BRAP, resulting in a situation where many people remain in emergency shelters for more extended periods.

Emergency homeless shelters play a vital role in our communities, particularly during housing crises. LD 698 would help alleviate some of the operating costs that shelters face, ensuring they remain operational. We urge you to pass this legislation because we cannot

afford to close shelters, have more people in our homeless system, or have people go unsheltered.

I appreciate your consideration in voting ought to pass.

Thank you.