

Mayor and Council Offices

Mark Dion

Mayor

April 8, 2025



Testimony of Mayor of the City of Portland, Mark Dion

Before

Committee on Housing and Economic Development

In Opposition to

LD 1179, An Act to Establish Minimum Safety Standards for Temporary Emergency Shelters

April 8, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development:

On behalf of the City of Portland, I write to express our opposition to LD 1179, An Act to Establish Minimum Safety Standards for Temporary Emergency Shelters.

Portland has long led the state in providing emergency shelter and wraparound services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We have done so not only to meet our obligations under the General Assistance statute, but because we believe in the fundamental value of ensuring that every Mainer has a safe place to sleep. As of 2024, Portland operates approximately 583 shelter beds across multiple facilities, including the Homeless Services Center, family shelter, and overflow sites for asylum seekers. This represents a substantial share of the state's total shelter capacity, which is estimated at around 1,170 beds statewide.

While we appreciate the intent behind LD 1179, to ensure basic safety standards for temporary emergency shelters, we cannot support this bill as written. It would create a new layer of state-mandated regulation over shelter operations without providing any corresponding funding or resources. In effect, it represents yet another unfunded mandate on the very municipalities that are already doing the most to meet this urgent and growing need.

This bill also raises serious home rule concerns. Local governments are best positioned to assess site-specific sheltering needs and respond quickly to emerging crises. Portland already has safety protocols in place, in close coordination with our fire department and code enforcement teams, to ensure that temporary emergency shelters meet appropriate health and safety standards. Adding a

new state regulatory structure could slow down our ability to act in real time—particularly during extreme weather or surges in need.

Municipalities should retain flexibility and autonomy to operate shelters in a manner responsive to local conditions, capacity, and staffing.

We urge the Committee to reject LD 1179.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark Dion", with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Mark Dion
Mayor
City of Portland, Maine