



Sanford Police Department

City of Sanford, Maine
935 Main Street
Sanford, Maine 04073
(207) 324-3644 Fax (207) 324-9199

Eric H. Small
Chief of Police
(207) 324-9170, Ext. 3200

Matthew D. Gagné
Deputy Chief of Police
(207) 324-9170, Ext. 3202

Mark J. Dyer
Major of Support Services
(207) 324-9170, Ext. 3203

Chad M. Allen
Major of Operations
(207) 324-9170, Ext. 3207

February 9, 2026

Chair, Senator, Representative, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Eric Small, and I serve as the Chief of Police for the City of Sanford. I am here to speak in support of the shelter funding bill currently before you, and to share what we are seeing at the local level as the availability of shelter space continues to fall short of the need.

Over the past several years, the City of Sanford has experienced a noticeable increase in homelessness. This is not an abstract policy issue for us, it is something our officers encounter every single day. When there are not enough shelter beds available, people are left with few options. Many end up sleeping in vehicles, in parks, in stairwells, or in other public and private spaces not meant for human habitation. This creates challenges not only for those experiencing homelessness, but also for surrounding neighborhoods, local businesses, and public safety resources.

From a policing perspective, the lack of shelter space has had a direct impact on calls for service. Our officers are increasingly responding to welfare checks, trespassing complaints, disturbances, and quality of life issues that stem from people simply having nowhere safe to go. These are not traditional law enforcement problems; they are human needs issues that end up being managed through a public safety response because there is no alternative available at that moment.

When shelter space is full, officers often have no practical solution. We can try to connect individuals with services, but if there is no bed available, there is nowhere to bring them. This leads to repeat calls for the same individuals and the same locations. It consumes time and resources that could otherwise be focused on crime prevention, investigations, and community policing.

We are also seeing an increase in calls involving mental health crises, substance use, and medical concerns among our unhoused population. These situations are complex and require patience, compassion, and time. Our officers do their best to respond in a professional and humane way, but law enforcement should not be the default safety net for gaps in shelter capacity.

For the past three years, the City of Sanford has taken a proactive approach to this issue by establishing a Homeless Task Force. This group brings together public safety, city officials, service providers, and community partners to share information, coordinate responses, and work toward long-term solutions. The Task Force has helped us better understand the scope of the problem, identify service gaps, and improve communication among the agencies working directly with this population. However, despite our local coordination and commitment, we continue to face the same core challenge: there are simply not enough shelter resources available to meet the demand.

In addition, the City of Sanford has hosted Legislative Summits to educate our legislative delegation on the real and growing impact homelessness is having on our community. These summits have allowed local leaders, service providers, and public safety officials to share firsthand experiences, data, and concerns. The goal has been to ensure that state policymakers understand what municipalities like Sanford are facing on the ground, and how the lack of shelter capacity directly affects public safety, municipal resources, and the well-being of those experiencing homelessness.

The impact on the city as a whole is significant. Residents and business owners are noticing the increase in homelessness and the related activity. It has created concerns about safety, public health, and the overall quality of life. At the same time, the individuals experiencing homelessness are often vulnerable and in need of stability, services, and a safe place to stay.

Stable shelter access helps reduce police calls for service. When people have a place to go, they are less likely to be in situations that result in police involvement. It allows outreach workers and service providers to connect with them more consistently, and it gives law enforcement an option other than simply moving people from one location to another.

This bill represents an investment not only in housing and human services, but in public safety. Supporting shelter capacity helps reduce strain on police, EMS, and fire resources. It allows us to focus on our core mission while ensuring that those in crisis have a safe and appropriate place to turn.

From the perspective of the Sanford Police Department and the City of Sanford, additional shelter funding would make a meaningful difference. It would support the work our Homeless Task Force has been engaged in for years, reinforce the concerns that have been raised during our Legislative Summits, provide practical options for our officers in the field, reduce repeat calls for service, and improve outcomes for individuals who are currently living without stable housing.

Thank you for your time, for your work on this issue, and for the opportunity to share what we are seeing in Sanford.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Eric H. Small', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Eric H. Small
Chief of Police

Eric Small
Sanford Police Department
LD 2124

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