

**Testimony In Support of LD 2124
An Act to Support Emergency Shelter Funding
Using Revenue from the Real Estate Transfer Tax**

February 10, 2026

Presented by: Shannon Carpenter, Finance Director, H.O.M.E. Inc.

Good afternoon, Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development. My name is Shannon Carpenter, and I am the Finance Director of H.O.M.E. Inc. in Orland, where we regularly serve families and individuals from neighboring municipalities in Hancock County (where we are located), as well communities in Washington, Waldo, and Penobscot Counties. I am also someone who has personally experienced homelessness. I'm here today in strong support of LD 2124.

As most people do, I came to H.O.M.E. when I was close to rock bottom. I had a daughter to raise but she wasn't able to be with me as I had no income, and no place to live. I come from a family that is the textbook example of generational poverty. I never had goals or dreams. That wasn't for me. My family came from generations of mental health challenges and addiction issues. I grew up in a world full of trauma; sexual, mental and physical abuse. Asking for help wasn't something that came easy to me. Stability and support were foreign to me. When I first reached out to H.O.M.E. I needed shelter and a job. I was a single mom who had just left an abusive relationship. Though shelter was full, H.O.M.E. took a chance and hired me for the day camp program. This temporary job helped me get a hotel room, allowed me to see my daughter consistently, and helped me secure a vehicle.

In the years since, H.O.M.E. has been a constant place I return to for support through the intense highs and lows in my life. Staff always took the time to hear me out and help me troubleshoot my life, dropping what they were doing to be there in the moment with me. With this constant support behind me, I was able to secure an apartment in low-income housing and bring my daughter H.O.M.E. with me. Stability!

H.O.M.E. became the place I wanted to be. These were people I wanted to surround myself with. If they could help me, I wanted to pass that along to others. I wanted to be part of this place that supported someone to dream that never thought dreams were for them. After working in H.O.M.E.'s finance department for a time, gaining job skills, I decided to go back to school for my accounting degree. Better myself in a way I never thought I could.

Even as my career started moving forward, my daughter was struggling. She was being bullied, afraid to go to school, and needing more support than I could give alone. Juggling her needs, work, and constant moves was overwhelming.

Whenever it felt like too much, I went to Rosa at H.O.M.E., and she helped me find a way through. H.O.M.E. gave me stability, support and the space to keep growing while I got my daughter the help she needed. Through every setback I felt supported.

Today, I'm proud to say I am the Finance Director at H.O.M.E. And I'm even more proud that my daughter has seen, firsthand, that generational poverty is not a destiny, it's something you can break through when there is community to surround us with support.

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What We See on the Ground Today: today things have only grown more difficult. Affordable housing is scarce, vouchers are disappearing, and rents and other costs of daily living remain high. The math is simple - when people stay longer in our shelters— we cannot serve as many overall. While we don't have precise turn-away numbers, I can tell you we are turning more people away than ever before, including families, older Mainers, and individuals with significant medical needs.

- In **2024**, the average stay in our shelter was **62 days**.
- In **2025**, that increased to approximately **72 days**.
- For larger families or people with serious mobility or other challenges, the average stay ranges from **90 days to many months** - there is simply nowhere else for them to go.

Rural Maine Has No Backups: Though located in Hancock County, we serve people from surrounding communities, including families without a family shelter in their home county, and individuals with substance use and other complex issues seeking respite from the people or influences in their home community who they feel are counterproductive to their recovery. We regularly see families and individuals from Penobscot, Washington, Waldo, and our home County of Hancock - many of whom travel long distances because there is simply no alternative where they live. And while we know that rural homelessness is real, unless an encampment pops up nearby or grabs headlines, it can feel hidden. But when our shelters strain or close, people end up in sleeping in the woods, cars, or other unstable, unsafe places or find themselves in more costly, less effective community resources like jails and hospitals.

The Safety Net of Last Resort: H.O.M.E. shelters as many as we can—and when we run out of beds, we don't simply turn people away. We maintain an informal warming space so people can come in when they need warmth or safety. Last week for example, facing brutal cold, we had a man walk in off the street with his dog. We found space for him.

And when a family is referred to us with nowhere to go but isn't appropriate for the mixed population and open nature of a temporary warming shelter, we find a space for them too. Whether in our volunteer center or a classroom. Warming centers themselves are important - but they do not and can not do what emergency shelters do—stabilize, assess barriers, connect people with services, and follow them into permanent housing.

We Cannot Build for the Future if We Cannot Survive the Present: At H.O.M.E., we pride ourselves on seeking long-term solutions. We have built 54 homes for homeownership, and are looking to create family-sized units so we can move families directly from shelter into housing. Our dream is to build deeply affordable family housing on our Orland campus—where children can access stability, on-site support, daycare, and the foundation they need to thrive. But right now, like so many of our residents - we must focus on immediate needs. We are running a significant deficit, and the shelter program is the largest gap. Our board is looking at a three-year window: if funding does not stabilize, we may be forced to consider reducing services—or closure.

Our private donors are extraordinarily committed. But we cannot fund the vast majority of shelter costs from donations, small grants, and patched-together dollars. It is just not sustainable.

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LD 2124 provides additional, ongoing, predictable funding that shelters like H.O.M.E. desperately need. It recognizes that emergency shelters are critical infrastructure to address Maine's ongoing housing crisis. Every community in Maine benefits when shelter providers can keep people safe, warm, and close to their home communities while they connect to resources and housing solutions. We are doing everything we can—but we cannot keep doing it without stable operating support.

Shelters are a lifeline. I know this because one saved me. And we are able to stand with others because you stand with us. I urge you to support LD 2124 increased support helps us say “yes” to the next mom who's scared, the next family who needs shelter, the next person who just needs someone to believe in them the way H.O.M.E. believed in me.