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**Testimony on behalf of Maine Equal Justice in *Support* of LD 2124, An Act to Support  
Emergency Shelter Funding Using Revenue from the Real Estate Transfer Tax**

**February 10, 2026**

Good afternoon Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and distinguished members of the Housing & Economic Development Committee. My name is Andrea Steward I use she/her pronouns and I am a policy advocate at Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit civil legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 2124.

Maine's emergency shelter system is an essential lifeline for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. This infrastructure reduces unnecessary human suffering as well as system, community, and statewide costs. There is a rich body of data that shows that people experiencing homelessness are disproportionately burdened by disease and use acute care services at high rates. A recent study found that even temporary shelter leads to measurable reductions in crime, emergency healthcare use, and mortality. Emergency shelters are a crucial piece of our public health response system and serve as a pathway to services and stable housing.

Adequate funding for the emergency shelter system is an equity measure. Despite making up less than 2% of the population in Maine, people who identify as Black or African American represent over 31% of Maine's homeless population.<sup>1</sup> The number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness increased by more than 11% from 2024 to 2025. These individuals often hold intersecting identities that exponentially increase their vulnerability. Specifically for those unsheltered on the night of the count, the largest subgroups represented were those living with serious mental illness, adults with a

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<sup>1</sup> MaineHousing PIT Count, 2025.

[https://www.mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/policy-research/research-reports/homeless-reports/2025-point-in-time-report.pdf?sfvrsn=9bab9c15\\_6](https://www.mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/policy-research/research-reports/homeless-reports/2025-point-in-time-report.pdf?sfvrsn=9bab9c15_6)

substance use disorder, or a survivor of domestic violence. We have seen how policies can work together to reduce harm, and robust and sustained funding for the emergency shelter system that directly supports better health outcomes and opportunities for our disenfranchised neighbors is a critical part.

Maine's emergency shelter system has struggled to meet increasing demand stemming from structural underfunding for years. Shelters have closed, and more are at risk. MaineHousing estimates the cost of shelter and services is approximately \$102 per night meanwhile Maine's shelter operations reimbursement rate is a fraction of this cost at \$7.16 and has been flat-funded since 2016.<sup>2</sup> These seismic gaps are unsustainable. In May of 2025, York County's *only* adult emergency shelter shut its doors after 45 years of operation.<sup>3</sup> Franklin County has no formal emergency shelter beds as the only emergency shelter in the county, which was in Farmington, closed in 2020. Without a reliable, permanent solution, Maine will continue to lose beds for our most vulnerable population.

While the one-time emergency funds provided last year for shelters did make a difference, LD 2124 addresses the dire need for an increase in operational funding *and* ties it to an ongoing revenue source that grows with inflation. A predictable revenue source allows shelters to forecast accordingly to keep beds open and be responsive to the needs of their communities. Reactive, short-term patches are not only temporary but also unnecessarily chaotic - draining energy and resources from the already over-capacity, over-burdened, and under-funded shelters.

We know that people trying to survive outdoors are disproportionately affected by illness, injury, trauma, and death. Individuals and families living outside are often not able to access the very programs intended to serve them as they manage these crises. Our shelters bring more people indoors, reduce costs to our municipalities, and protect public safety and health. LD 2124 is a critical investment in our path towards affordable housing and will have wide-reaching effects beyond their beds and doors.

For these reasons Maine Equal Justice urges you to vote ought to pass on LD 2124.

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<sup>2</sup> MaineHousing Shelter Cost Study, 2025.

[https://www.mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/policy-research/research-reports/homeless-reports/2025-shelter-cost-study.pdf?sfvrsn=bc669d15\\_3](https://www.mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/policy-research/research-reports/homeless-reports/2025-shelter-cost-study.pdf?sfvrsn=bc669d15_3)

<sup>3</sup> Portland Press Herald:

<https://www.pressherald.com/2025/05/02/york-countys-only-homeless-shelter-will-close-for-lack-of-funds>