

Re: LD 2212 – An Act Making Unified Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government for FY26 and FY27

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Housing and Economic Development Committees:

Our names are Amanda Bartlett and Andrew Lardie, and we serve as Co-Chairs of the SHC/MCoC Policy and Advocacy Committee. Our committee is a joint standing committee of the Statewide Homeless Council and the Maine Continuum of Care and represents a broad cross-section of providers, municipal leaders, system partners, and advocates working to strengthen Maine's homelessness response system through coordinated, data-informed policy.

We are writing today to urge your support for shelter operating funding and Emergency Housing Relief investments included in LD 2212.

Maine's homelessness response system continues to operate under sustained strain due to a confluence of increased need, rising costs and lack of funding. Low vacancy rates, escalating rents, and limited housing exits have led to longer shelter stays and elevated utilization across the state. These are structural market pressures not temporary fluctuations, and they require immediate stabilization resources to ensure the system remains functional while longer-term housing supply strategies advance.

\$12 Million – Emergency Housing Relief Fund

The Emergency Housing Relief Fund provides critical flexibility at a time when communities need it most. These funds support emergency shelter operations, diversion efforts, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent housing placements. That flexibility allows communities to deploy resources strategically, preventing short-term housing instability from escalating into prolonged or chronic homelessness.

Without this investment, strain within the system will deepen. Increased unsheltered homelessness, longer shelter stays, and fewer diversion opportunities will result in higher costs absorbed by municipalities, hospitals, behavioral health systems, and law enforcement. The Relief Fund functions as a pressure valve, preserving system flow and preventing more expensive downstream interventions.

Increased Support for Emergency Shelters (ESHAP)

We also strongly support the proposed increases to MaineHousing's Emergency Shelter and Housing Assistance Program \$1.25 million in the current fiscal year and \$1.5 million in the next.

Shelters across Maine are navigating sustained high utilization, longer lengths of stay due to limited housing exits, increasing medical and behavioral health acuity among guests, workforce shortages, and significant inflationary pressures affecting food, utilities, insurance, and staffing. Many providers are operating on razor-thin margins while serving more complex needs than ever before and have done so for years without meaningful increases in operational funding.

Emergency shelters are a core component of Maine’s homelessness response infrastructure. They provide immediate safety, connection to coordinated entry and case management, access to healthcare and behavioral health services, and pathways to permanent housing. They serve as stabilization hubs, preventing further trauma, reducing exposure to violence and exploitation, and mitigating strain on emergency rooms and public safety systems.

When shelter operations destabilize, the consequences are immediate: increased unsheltered homelessness, expanded encampments, heightened public health risks, and escalating costs across other public systems. Maintaining stable shelter capacity is not optional in the current housing market, it is foundational to preserving an orderly, coordinated response.

System Impact

These investments are not isolated line items; they are structural supports for the functioning of Maine’s entire homelessness response system. Emergency Housing Relief preserves flexibility and flow. Shelter operating funding maintains stabilization capacity. Together, they ensure that individuals and families remain connected to coordinated entry, services, and housing pathways, preventing system breakdown and reducing costly spillover into healthcare, corrections, and municipal systems. Until Maine’s housing supply meets demand, these investments remain essential to sustaining a balanced, effective, and humane response to homelessness.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to strengthening Maine’s housing and homelessness response infrastructure.

Amanda Bartlett, Co-Chair
Policy and Advocacy Committee
Maine Continuum of Care

Andrew Lardie, Co-Chair
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