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LD 2212

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Grohoski, Representative Sayre, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation, my name is Joan Beal and I live in Norway, Maine.

Two principles in my religious tradition, Unitarian Universalism, hold that every person has inherent worth and dignity and that we should promote justice, equity and compassion in human relationships. It is out of these universal principles that I feel called to urge you to support the Governor's proposed shelter funding in the supplemental budget, along with additional funding to fully support our shelter system, as proposed in LD 2124.

About two weeks ago, a man whom I had provided some casual help such as rides, a bicycle, and odd job opportunities, arrived at my door, having been evicted at the beginning of the worst cold spell of the winter. He is on SSI, has some developmental disabilities, fairly severe asthma, and some limited literacy skills. He does not smoke, drink, or have any substance abuse problems. He also does not have a case worker. I am simply a private citizen, not a social worker or case manager. After many many phone calls, all over the state, I could not find a single opening for a single man in any shelter. He slept on my floor for 5 nights. If I had not put him up, perhaps he could have survived by sitting in the hospital waiting room or sleeping in a storage facility, which is what he did two years ago when he was homeless. Others may break into abandoned buildings or commit crimes in order to find a warm place to stay. However, it is also possible that he would have frozen to death. It took five days before I found him a place that could admit him without a case manager. I wondered about just how many other people were trying to find ways to survive that spell of frigid temperatures.

Maine's shelters are overwhelmed and in rural areas, like Oxford County, there simply are none that allow for this kind of emergency, low barrier safety. Rumford Group Homes, which operates a family shelter, is in danger of closing due to the impossibility of the allowable reimbursement meeting the actual cost of keeping the shelter open. While temporary access to shelter prevents death and suffering, it is also shown to decrease crime, medical crises and the cycle of tragedies that follow.

Maine needs more than short term fixes for this problem. We are watching larger, more lavish, and expensive homes being built throughout the state. Surely some of the revenue generated by this type of housing can make it possible for less fortunate Mainers to simply survive. No one should die of exposure. I urge you to vote to support the Governor's proposed shelter funding such as that in LD2124.