

Hello Chair Baldacci, Chair Meyer, and honorable members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Lisa Franklin, and I am an Advocate with Homeless Voices for Justice. I am here today to ask that you please vote in favor of LD599: An Act to Provide Support Services for a Transitional Housing Program for Homeless Persons.

When I was homeless, I stayed at both the Oxford Street Shelter and Florence House. I didn't have any terrible illnesses, but if you do, there is nowhere to rest for the day. For folks who are in a difficult position, having a place to rest is incredibly important. Being able to lay down for a full day when you are sick and healing is necessary, and not many shelters are able to provide that. At Oxford Street, I was sleeping on a mat on the ground and was very close to everyone else. We all had to be awake and out of the shelter by 7:00 in the morning. I had a friend that I made while I was homeless who was seventy years old. She had a chronic condition that was acting up while we were at the shelter and couldn't heal while in that environment. Luckily, I was able to help her get her medications, but without consistent support and rest, she had a very difficult time.

The importance of shelter that provides a secure, consistent, and respectful environment cannot be overstated. When individuals can have their daily needs met in one space, without having to worry about where their next meal will come from or whether their belongings will be safe, they are able to focus on improving other elements of their lives. Shelters like Elena's Way provide space for folks to heal, both mentally and physically, from the experiences that they may have had prior to moving into the shelter. If my friend had been able to access a shelter like Elena's Way while we were homeless, she may have been able to receive more consistent care for her illness. The model of Elena's Way also allows for the creation of strong relationships between providers and residents, forming bonds that help to strengthen the whole community. Funding for programs like this is vital. Without qualified and trained social work staff, these programs cannot function. To ensure that staff can meet the needs of the shelter residents, funding must be provided to ensure that they are adequately compensated and can continue to do this important work.

As the population of unsheltered folks in Maine, and particularly in the Portland area, continues to rise, we must be able to address this crisis in a compassionate and thoughtful way. By funding Elena's Way, we are ensuring that individuals with incredibly high levels of need can access shelter. This is vital to keeping our communities safe and healthy. I urge you to invest in the most vulnerable of our neighbors by voting to pass LD599.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa Franklin

Advocate

Homeless Voices for Justice