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May 12, 2023

Testimony of Rep. Poppy Arford presenting

LD 1844, An Act to Support Emergency Housing Facility Construction, Renovation and Acquisition Statewide by Creating a Matching Grant Program

Before the Joint Select Committee on Housing

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and respected colleagues of the Housing Committee, I am Poppy Arford, Representative of District 101 in Brunswick. Thank you for the opportunity to present **LD 1844, An Act to Support Emergency Housing Facility Construction, Renovation and Acquisition Statewide by Creating a Matching Grant Program**. I will be speaking to my proposed amendment, which was provided to you in advance of this hearing and is also attached to my testimony.

Emergency housing or shelters are the “emergency room” of our statewide housing system. As hospital emergency rooms are central to stabilizing those facing significant medical distress, 24-hour shelters play a similar role for those experiencing homelessness. Providing for a statewide emergency shelter network with adequate capacity is critical to starting our homeless Mainers on a path to safe and stable housing.

To address this need, LD 1844 establishes an emergency housing matching grant program. The program will be managed by the Maine State Housing Authority and, through an annual RFP process, provide funding for new construction, renovation, and acquisition of existing buildings for the purpose of providing critically needed emergency housing for people experiencing homelessness.

The Housing and Urban Development (HUD) 2022 Annual Homeless Assessment Report tells us that last year, on one night in January, a total of 4,411 Mainers were homeless, an increase of 110% from the 2020 number of 2,097 Maine people. This includes individuals, families, and unaccompanied minors experiencing homelessness. Of those 4,411 people experiencing homelessness, 164 were sleeping unsheltered in the height of winter, on what must have been a very cold night.

I will share two stories that speak to the problem. On another cold night in late November of 2019, 64-year-old Russell Williams, a Brunswick resident experiencing homelessness, was found dead lying beside the railroad tracks in his sleeping bag. Fast forward to this year, on a rainy, chilly night last week, when an older woman, who I will call Mary, noticed my legislative license plates at a Brunswick gas station and approached me to express her gratitude for my service. After I thanked her for the kind words, Mary went on to share her personal story of being unexpectedly homeless in Brunswick with no stable housing in sight.

In sharing Russell and Mary's stories, the painful sense of loss and regret I felt when I first learned of Russell's death, and again when I met Mary, is again with me. I believe that, to a greater or lesser degree, all of us feel pain when we hear the stories of people experiencing homelessness and imagine what it must be like to live the stories. We are faced with the reality that our statewide emergency housing network is woefully inadequate. It was not able to provide critically needed emergency housing to Russell or Mary – and hundreds more who find themselves along the continuum of being unexpectedly to chronically homeless statewide. I appreciate that many organizations, private and public, are working very hard to respond, as with the Maine Housing grant funds totaling \$16.3 million for shelter and housing supports, which were awarded in March of this year. Yet, in truth, it is simply not enough – much more is needed.

I am offering LD 1844, which provides \$5 million in funding for an Emergency Housing Matching Grant Program, to respond to this need. The program would award grants of up to \$500,000 per recipient and require a one-to-one match from another funding source. Recipients would need to provide 24/7 emergency housing and housing navigation services within the facility built or acquired using the grant funding. I am offering a matching grant program to support Maine communities in stepping up to address the need for emergency housing statewide.

I understand that this bill is but one of many submitted this session to meet the spectrum of affordable housing needs Maine people are experiencing, from access to emergency shelters and housing navigation services, to housing first programs, permanent supportive housing, rental assistance, and subsidized home ownership – the goal being for every Maine resident to have an affordable, safe, permanent home. LD 1844 works in sync with LD 2 and other proposals addressing our statewide housing crisis. Together, if passed and funded, these bills will be the "enough" that is needed to move through the housing crisis to a place where housing for all is becoming a reality in Maine.

Thank you for the time and attention you are giving to LD 1844 and all the excellent housing bills put forward this session. I am happy to answer any questions you may have for me.

REFERENCES

The 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress, Maine Summary; pg. 98.
<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2022-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

Maine Housing Awards \$16.3 Million For Shelter and Housing Supports Statewide 3.23.2023
<https://mainehousing.org/news/news-detail/2023/03/23/mainehousing-awards---16.3-million-for-shelter-and-housing-supports-statewide>

LD 2, "An Act to Address Maine's Housing Crisis"
http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/display_ps.asp?ld=2&PID=1456&snum=131

SPONSOR'S AMENDMENT

LD 1844 An Act to Support Emergency Housing Construction and Renovation Statewide by Creating a Matching Grant Program

The following text replaces the original text for LD 1844.

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 30-A MRSA §4766 is enacted to read:

§4766. Emergency Housing Matching Grant Program

1. Program established. The Emergency Housing Matching Grant Program, referred to in this section as "the program," is established within the Maine State Housing Authority.
2. Purpose. The purpose of the program is to provide grants to homeless program providers for the construction, renovation, or acquisition of a new or existing building to house the homeless programs.
3. Recipient criteria. A recipient of a grant under the program must:
 - A. Agree to provide emergency housing in accordance with the Maine State Housing Authority's Emergency Shelter and Housing Assistance Program (ESHAP)
 - B. Provide 24/7 emergency housing and housing navigation in the building constructed, renovated, or acquired with the grant, and
 - C. Match the grant on a one-to-one ratio with funds from a source other than state funding.
4. Request for proposals; amount of grant. The Maine State Housing Authority shall provide grants on an annual basis and issue a request for proposals to award grants under the program no later than January 1st of the year in which a grant will be issued. The RFP rules shall be developed by the Housing Authority and include a maximum of \$500,000 per recipient.
5. Fund. The Emergency Housing Matching Grant Program Fund, referred to in this subsection as "the fund," is established within the Maine State Housing Authority to fund grants under the program. The fund may receive money from appropriations, allocations, donations, and other sources, public and private. The fund is interest-bearing, and interest earned by the fund is credited to the fund. Funds in the fund do not lapse but carry-over to the next fiscal year.
6. Rules. The Maine State Housing Authority may adopt rules to implement this section. Rules adopted pursuant to this subsection are routine technical rules as defined in 21 Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A.

Sec. 2. Request for proposals. No later than January 1, 2024, the Maine State Housing Authority shall issue a request for proposals for grants under the Emergency Housing Matching Grant Program under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 30-A, section 4766, for the 2024 grant year under the program.

Sec. 3. Appropriations and allocations. The following appropriations and allocations are made.

HOUSING AUTHORITY, MAINE STATE

Emergency Housing Matching Grant Program N430

Initiative: Establishes ongoing base allocations to allow for the expenditure of funds if money is received from donations and other public or private sources.

OTHER SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS	2023-24	2024-25
All Other	\$500	\$500

OTHER SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS TOTAL	<u>\$500</u>	<u>\$500</u>
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Emergency Housing Matching Grant Program N430

Initiative: Provides ongoing appropriations for grants to homeless service providers to construct, renovate or acquire new or existing buildings to house the homeless services.

GENERAL FUND	2023-24	2024-25
All Other	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000

GENERAL FUND TOTAL	<u>\$5,000,000</u>	<u>\$5,000,000</u>
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HOUSING AUTHORITY, MAINE STATE

DEPARTMENT TOTALS	2023-24	2024-25
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GENERAL FUND	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000
OTHER SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS	\$500	\$500

DEPARTMENT TOTAL - ALL FUNDS	<u>\$5,000,500</u>	<u>\$5,000,500</u>
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SUMMARY

This bill establishes the Emergency Housing Matching Grant Program to issue grants to homeless program providers to construct, renovate or acquire new or existing buildings to house the homeless services, including emergency housing 24 hours per day, 7 days per week and housing navigation in the building. Recipients must match the grants on a one-to-one basis from a source other than state funding. The bill also includes an appropriations and allocations section.