



ADVOCATES:

Cheryl Harkins

Lisa Franklin

Mike Stuckmeyer

Jim Devine

Ben Martineau

Carolyn Silvius

Good afternoon Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Committee on Housing,

My name is Cheryl Harkins. I reside in South Portland. I am an Advocate with lived experience with Homeless Voices for Justice and the National Alliance to End Homelessness. I'm also the person that Governor Mills appointed to serve on the Board of the Statewide Homeless Council to represent Region One as an advocate with lived experience. She told me she trusted that I would be a voice for the most vulnerable, the voiceless community of the unhoused. I'm here today to do my job.

Today I am asking your committee to vote 'ought to pass' regarding LD 2136, to provide a fiscal note of 10 million dollars to help support shelters for unhoused individuals. Homelessness is at a crisis in our state. There are hundreds of people living outside in York County alone, over 100 still outside in the Portland area. Every county has been affected. There are additional warming centers there there's a limit to capacity. Even though the Homeless Services Center in Portland is almost completely full, include the addition of 50 beds, we watch encampment sweeps continue in Portland. Many are simply pulling a tarp over them for shelter because their tents and belongings are destroyed or lost during these sweeps. The Lewiston area, Waterville, and Bangor are overflowing with people stuck outside for various reasons around our state.

We cannot allow shelters to close. There are not enough housing units built. Prices are through the roof. Nobody working a "regular" job can afford to live in many of the units available. The only sensible solution is to keep shelters open and funded properly, and even to build more shelters where they are needed. People will be able to rebound from difficulty without having to relocated and potentially leave their source of employment.

Maine takes care of Maine. The sponsor and cosponsors of LD 2136 recognize the necessity. Human beings should not have to hide under a tarp. People do not lose their value simply because they have no immediate structure around them. The unhoused are individuals who should be recognized. This funding will help. Housing and shelter are basic human rights. Please vote in favor of LD 2136.

Thank you for your consideration.