

York County
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Testimony of the Carter Friend, CEO of York County Community Action Corp.
In support of
LD 2136 An Act to Provide Financial Support for Shelter for Unhoused Individuals

Senator Peirce, Representative Gere, and Honorable Members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing.

My name is Carter Friend, and I am the CEO of York County Community Action Corporation (YCCAC.) The mission of our organization is to alleviate the effects of poverty and to attack its underlying causes. In order to advance our mission, we deliver a range of health, educational and social services across York County's 29 municipalities. We support the passage of LD 2136.

We are both a designated Community Action Agency and a Federally Qualified Health Center. Through our work we interact with tens of thousands of York County residents every year. Our vision is that all York County residents have the opportunity to succeed - which we believe means have the opportunity to achieve social well-being, economic well-being and good health.

Increasingly, in programs across our organization, from our primary care practice to our Head Start pre-school program, we are encountering individuals and families who are without the most basic of all resources: shelter.

Communities across Maine and York County have seen an exponential increase in the number of people with no housing. Sanford, to take just one example, has seen a staggering 1420% increase in the number of unhoused people over the past three years. Currently, all of the shelter beds in York County are full, and wait lists are long. Warming center capacity is also inadequate to meet the current demand, a potentially dangerous state given the recent harsh weather.

This committee has provided leadership and used creativity in crafting solutions to address Maine's severe lack of affordable housing. The important investments you have made in programs like Housing First, the Rural Affordable Housing Program, and resources for the Emergency Housing Relief Fund, will make real and lasting improvements in our state. While the value of these initiatives will be enduring, it will take time—in some cases years-- before the full beneficial effects are realized.

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LD 2136 is so important because it will provide critically needed resources for organizations providing the most fundamental and immediately needed resource: emergency shelter. We know current funding for shelters is inadequate to meet present demand. Even more concerning, we have heard from two of Maine's largest shelter providers that without additional support they will be forced to curtail operations at some of their low-barrier shelter facilities.

The investment in the Shelter Operating Fund managed by Maine Housing that LD 2136 will provide will save lives. We urge you to support its passage and its full funding.

Thank you again for your hard work and for considering our comments today.

Sincerely,

Carter Friend, CEO
York County Community Action Corp.