

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, my name is Shawn Yardley and I serve as the chair of the Statewide Homeless Council. In 2005, I am here to speak in support of LD2136 and LD 2138.

Emergency shelters have been in crisis mode and capacity/overflowing for years. Shelters haven't had enough resources to function optimally.

In order to end and prevent homelessness in Maine, there must be a sufficiently funded emergency shelter system to meet the needs of and have capacity for people experiencing homelessness. Low-barrier shelters are currently operating at a nearly four-million-dollar cumulative deficit. Low-barrier shelters cost more than other shelters to operate due to significant staffing requirements and the intensity of the work, including regular overdose prevention and the thoughtful, intensive aftercare that is required. Low-barrier shelters provide the primary entry point to the healthcare system and recovery community for unsheltered community members, providing ongoing outreach, case management, and connection to recovery programs and services, including primary healthcare and social work services, either by providing those services on-site or through community partners. Low-barrier shelters are often a primary entry point for unsheltered community members who have little to no access to social, behavioral, and medical service providers. Low-barrier shelters are currently at capacity and are hampered by inadequate state revenue streams, causing deficits, and creating the distinct possibility of shelter closures. They play an essential role in the continuum of care for the chronically homeless and are the first step towards site-based Housing First and more stability.

Thank you for prioritizing the shelter system in the last session and for ensuring that LD 2 was incorporated in the Governor's Supplemental Budget. The existing shelter operating subsidy system funding goes to 39 shelters throughout the state. To address the funding crisis at low-barrier shelters with that line item will require a lot more investment than creating a separate line item for funding low-barrier shelters. Please vote to pass LD 2136 and LD 2138 (as amended) with the amended language allowing for a separate funding line item for low-barrier shelters – separate from the shelter operating subsidy line.