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Testimony of Rep. Amy Roeder in support of
LD 2138, Resolve, to Improve Funding for Homeless Shelters
Before the Joint Select Committee on Housing

Good afternoon Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and honorable members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing. My name is Amy Roeder, and I represent House District 23, which includes a portion of Bangor. I am pleased to support **LD 2138, Resolve, to Improve Funding for Homeless Shelters**.

I honestly don't know where to begin. Bangor is in crisis. Since the pandemic, our unhoused population has grown exponentially. We have no idea by how much, though, because our town no longer has a reliable count of the unhoused and seems overwhelmed and unable to complete one. What we do know is that our shelters and our warming centers operate at capacity for the majority of the year. What we do know is that our public lands have become tent cities. What we do know is that our unhoused population is growing, in dire need of services that our municipality is struggling to provide.

In the midst of this crisis, we received news that, without funding to address an ongoing budget shortfall, our low barrier shelter will close. Without our low barrier shelter – without low barrier shelters across the state – we lose a link in the continuum of care for the chronically unhoused. The Governor allocated funding for Housing First initiatives because we, as a state, have recognized that we must either find solutions to assist the chronically unhoused or accept that we are a state that is fine with allowing some folks to live outside because of their illnesses. I know that is not who we are. I know it.

Outside of the legislature, I am the interim executive director of Maine Mental Health Connections / Together Place Peer Run Recovery Services. We provide support services to mental health consumers and folks with substance use disorder as they pursue recovery. Several of our members have stayed at Hope House. Some still are. Some can't get in because it's almost always at capacity. Let me also tell you what I've heard from friends who work with case managers and from a pastor who runs a warming center at his church. More than once, our overwhelmed hospitals have had to discharge an unhoused person to the street without resources, a place to go or any guidance. We know the dire straits our hospitals are in and I mention this not to shame them, but to show you how dire our situation is even WITH a

low barrier shelter. If Hope House closes, our hospitals, our one remaining shelter and our warming centers will collapse under the weight of our community's need. My friend Anne Sweeney runs an organization called Hope for Homeless and she answers calls at all hours of the day responding to the needs of all of the organizations that provide services to the unhoused. Without drawing a paycheck, she brings clothing to the unhoused discharged from hospitals when a social worker calls. She brings food and supplies to shelters when they call. She connects the unhoused she knows with case managers. She gives blessing bags to case managers to give to their clients. She gets donations of brand new furniture for the folks who are finally able to make the transition to their own apartments. She is just one organization, just one person in a community of helpers, but we cannot expect a group of helpers who are already struggling under the weight of this crisis to shoulder the weight should Hope House close.

I'm not a fan of hyperbole in testimony. In my own committee, I keep hearing how a bill would end all business in Maine and salt the earth behind it or drive workers into neighboring states in droves so I know that extreme language is easy to ignore. Please do not ignore this. I am here testifying because this is a matter of life and death. I cannot state that more clearly. Some of those lives belong to people I know, people I love and people who I worry about. Please vote ought to pass on this critical bill.