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United Way  
of Southern Maine



Hello, Senator Nagle, Representative Stover, and Members of the Committee on State and Local Government,

My name is Taylor Cray, and I am the Advocacy Supervisor at Preble Street. I am here today to support LD 2146: An Act to Prohibit Certain Municipalities from Adopting Moratoria on Emergency Shelter.

The State of Maine is currently experiencing a crisis in its need for shelter and housing. As the Governor acknowledged in her recent State of the State address, the housing crisis in Maine has created an explosion of individuals in need of emergency shelter and housing. LD 2146 supports the state's need to expand its emergency shelter system as we continue to exist on the front lines of a larger housing crisis. Shelters are equivalent to emergency rooms for those experiencing homelessness. When there is nowhere else to go, there should be emergency shelter. We need an emergency shelter response throughout the State of Maine to address this crisis. Today in Portland, in freezing weather, the only warming center in the city closed at seven in the morning. No other available public spaces were open until the library opened at ten in the morning. Shelters play a critical role in keeping individuals safe, and should not be limited.

Throughout the past few months, shelters across the state, particularly low-barrier shelters, have been sounding the alarm about the lack of funding and resources available. A low-barrier shelter accepts someone regardless of sobriety, treatment for mental illness, or history of criminal convictions. These shelters generally serve those with the most significant challenges, including acute mental illness, substance use disorder, and severe physical health problems. Low-barrier shelters across Maine are currently at capacity, severely limiting access to the care and services they provide.

While low-barrier shelters are only a portion of the larger need for shelter, the immediacy of their situation illustrates the much larger need for shelter across the state. This bill will help to ensure that the creation of emergency shelters is an option for municipalities across the state. At a time when housing options are limited and our unhoused populations continue to grow, it is imperative that we can create emergency shelters in neighborhoods across Maine. I ask that you please vote in favor of LD 2146.

I appreciate your consideration.