

**Testimony before the
Committee on State and Local Government
By Cynthia Cushing, Community Case Manager**

January 30, 2024

**RE: LD 2146, An Act to Prohibit Certain Municipalities
from Adopting Moratoria on Emergency Shelters**

Good afternoon, members of the State and Local Government Committee; thank you for the work that you do, and for allowing me to speak today. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide testimony **in support of LD 2146**, An Act to Prohibit Certain Municipalities from Adopting Moratoria on Emergency Shelters.

My name is Cynthia Cushing and I am a case manager for adults with developmental disabilities. I also currently serve as the Vice President for the National Association of Social Workers' Maine Chapter.

My guess is that many of you are contacted by constituents who are worried for their safety; they reach out to share stories of people on the street corners asking for money, of finding needles on the ground near their homes or businesses, and of seeing people acting in ways which appear unsafe to them.

We all want to feel safe; this includes people who are unhoused. While each situation of solicitation, maladaptive behavior in public, or littering is individual, those who are unhoused have the collective burden of trying to feel safe while also being stigmatized because someone in the community has engaged in the above activities. It is possible that the person who was asking for money wasn't unhoused, but this isn't

what's shared in the media. The stereotype and stigma is that people who are unhoused are solicitous drug users who are dangerous.

Which is why a moratoria in a large city, or any city for that matter, should not be allowed. When citizens feel unsafe because there are unhoused people camping out near them, for example, the answer isn't fewer housing options, and it isn't to create scenarios where specific cities must shoulder the burden because other places are not welcoming.

There are numerous bills being heard in this session around increasing funding to provide shelter options for those who are unhoused, and to adequately pay staff within these shelters; these are all necessary. LD 2146 is also necessary because it allows options. Those who are already struggling with finding and having a place to stay shouldn't face increased barriers in accessing a warm space, a bed, and safe assistance should there be a medical incident or need.

When those who are unhoused have access to resources, this promotes feelings of safety within a community for *all* citizens. The unhoused person who has a substance use disorder is less likely to leave needles on the ground outside if there is a safe place to dispose of them. The unhoused person who asks for money on the street corner is less likely to engage in this kind of behavior if they have a warm place to sleep and access to food and clothing. Situations of people who are unhoused is an emergency issue across our state. Setting up moratoria to disallow options is not the answer; it works against finding a solution.

In closing, I would like to say that all people deserve shelter, food, and safety. Passing LD 2146 allows that to happen, because it eliminates yet another barrier to

options for people who are unhoused. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to provide this testimony today.