



Testimony in Support of LD 2146

January 30, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and Esteemed Members of the State and Local Government Committee,

My name is Tess Parks, and I am a Policy Organizer with Maine Recovery Advocacy Project (ME-RAP), a bipartisan grassroots network dedicated to lifting the voices of people in recovery through community-driven and policy-based solutions. I myself am a person in long term recovery from substance use disorder (SUD). I am here today to testify on behalf of ME-RAP in strong support of LD 2146.

Communities across Maine are grappling with both the devastating consequences of a housing and opioid crisis. According to research shared by American Addiction Centers, around 1/3 of people who are unhoused have problems with alcohol or drugs, and around 2/3 of unhoused people have lifetime histories of drug or alcohol use disorders¹.

Having access to an emergency shelter can sometimes be the difference between life or death for any unhoused community member. Last February, Maine had one of the coldest nights recorded in the last 5 years with actual air temperatures dropping to -15 to -25 across the state². In addition to temperature-related health risks, many unhoused community members with SUD are at a higher risk of a fatal overdose. Unhoused community members accounted for 21% of the fatal overdoses in Portland in last year³. Shelter staff reverse many overdoses by administering naloxone that may have otherwise been fatal.

A defining characteristic of SUD is the inability to stop using substances, despite harmful consequences, such as losing shelter. An emergency shelter may be the only safe place that a person with SUD can access when facing homelessness. Any efforts by a municipality to put moratoriums on emergency shelters put vulnerable lives at risk.

We urge this Committee to save lives by supporting LD 2146.

I thank you for your time and would be happy to answer any questions.

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¹ Polcin, D. L. (2016). Co-occurring substance abuse and mental health problems among homeless persons: suggestions for research and practice. *Journal of social distress and the homeless*, 25(1), 1–10.

² <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2023/02/03/weather/brutal-cold-has-arrived-mainer-0vz0a9n507/>

³ Testimony of Terence Miller, Advocacy Director at Preble Street on LD 1975
<https://legislature.maine.gov/bills/getTestimonyDoc.asp?id=180094>