



February 23, 2024

Honorable Senators Rotundo and Pierce, Representatives Sachs and Gere and members of the Appropriations and Housing Committees:

My name is Rev. Christine Dyke, I am Lead Minister at First Parish Church UCC in Gorham. In April of 2023 we were awarded what became \$450,000 by Maine Housing, from funds from the Legislature, to construct and operate 4 units of transitional housing.

We are a proof of concept. Transitional Housing is the step in-between emergency shelter and permanent housing. Transitional Housing for families provides a sleeping space for each family, with walls and a lockable door, and a shared cooking and living space. Best practice is to also offer each family their own bathroom, but our space did not allow for that, so we provide shared bathrooms.

The construction cost to renovate a floor of our church education wing was \$372,000. It is under \$500,000 because our building was built in the late 1980's and we had a pre-existing sprinkler system. Nonetheless, substantial upgrades were required to the building to meet fire code for a boarding house, which is allowed under Gorham zoning. Over a 10-year capitalization that is a cost of \$775/family/month.

We based our yearly operations budget on the GA maximum for zero bedrooms, which is \$1350/month/family. We charge slightly less for two of our rooms because they are smaller. We estimate, if we can help the families manage the labyrinth that is GA, an operating income of \$4900/month, which is \$1225/family/month. We are currently serving asylum seeking families and know that they are dependent on GA as their ability to work is limited by federal law.

That income allows us to cover the building operating expenses for that floor, savings for ongoing repairs and maintenance and the replacement of appliances and furniture, and all cleaning supplies. The church also chooses to use a portion of the income for the basic needs of the residents, such as food, bus passes and personal items. Currently, Gorham GA does not give the families any money for food or personal items. We are told that because there is a food pantry in Gorham, there is no need. The Gorham Food Pantry, while a wonderful organization that the church supports, does not and cannot provide all the food that families need. Food Pantries are supplemental. Therefore, members of First Parish visit five food pantries during the month and bring the food to the residents. Without cars, accessing five food pantries to obtain the food they need would be exhausting, if not nearly impossible using public transportation.

We also choose to use some of the income to provide a bus pass for every person over five years old, which could cost up to \$660 per month.

We also provide all bedding, including bed and mattresses, furniture, towels, car seats, strollers, and kitchen needs through donations and purchases.

We contract with Greater Portland Family Promise to provide 2.5 hours of case management/family/week at a cost of \$308/family/month. This cost is covered in the grant for the first year, and we will be seeking other grants to cover the costs in subsequent years.

Our total costs of operation, including operating costs, capitalization of construction and case management are approximately \$2200/month/family.

We have chosen to focus on families without chronic mental health concerns, chronic homelessness and/or substance misuse. We can provide transitional housing for this cost because we do not have 24/7 staffing in the building. We also have no mortgage on the building.

We are providing a cost effective, effective, and humane form of Transitional Housing. We believe that other houses of worship would be able to host Transitional Housing if construction, operating costs, and support were available. We believe that organizations like Greater Portland Family Promise could manage scatter site Transitional Housing in a cost effective and humane manner.

First Parish Church is showing that a local group of people can impact the housing crisis when we are given financial and operational support. The members of my congregation urge you to invest in long-term and sustainable solutions to the housing crisis we are facing. We believe Maine can be an example and leader for the nation.

Thank you