



Rachel Talbot Ross  
Senator, District 28

THE MAINE SENATE  
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333

*Testimony of Senator Rachel Talbot Ross introducing*  
**LD 698, An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development*  
March 18, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Honorable Colleagues on the Housing and Economic Development Committee, I am Senator Rachel Talbot Ross. I represent Senate District 28, which includes part of Portland and Peaks Island.

Thank you for the opportunity to present LD 698, An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine. I want to thank the cosponsors of this bill for their support of our vital statewide shelter network and extend deep appreciation to Committee Chairs Senator Curry and Representative Gere for their leadership, and to this committee for its commitment to addressing homelessness and housing needs in our state.

LD 698 is simple in construction yet essential in impact. It would increase by a modest but critical amount, state funding for emergency shelter operations provided through MaineHousing by adding \$5 million to the Shelter Operating Subsidy.

Maine's emergency shelter network is in crisis. Stagnant funding and record-high homelessness have left providers running unsustainable deficits. State funding for emergency shelter operations has remained unchanged since 2016, despite rising costs and demand.

To put this in context, in 2014, the total state share of funding for the Emergency Shelter and Housing Assistance Program (ESHAP) was just \$365,000. Recognizing the growing need, the Legislature raised it to \$2.5 million in 2016 — but it has remained flat ever since. Meanwhile, the demand for shelter beds has surged, and providers have been forced to rely on unstable funding sources.

In recent years, efforts to increase this funding have been made but not enacted. Most notably, from the 131st Legislature, LD 2136, introduced by Rep. Mastraccio, proposed allocating \$10 million annually to the Shelter Operating Subsidy, later amended by the former Housing committee to \$12.5 million to include low-barrier shelters. Despite broad recognition of the need, the bill ultimately did not pass, leaving shelters without this crucial funding boost.



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A 2024 MaineHousing study found that operating a single shelter bed costs \$102 per night. Yet, the state subsidy remains just \$7.16 per bed, leaving shelters to cover the remaining \$95 through fundraising, grants, and municipal aid. LD 698 proposed increase would bring the state's contribution to \$19 per bed night — still modest but a much-needed step toward sustainability.

Shelters are lifelines — not just temporary housing but crucial resources that help individuals move toward stability. Research shows that people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are at significantly higher risk of physical illness, mental health crises, substance use disorders, trauma, and death compared to those in shelters.

If Maine's emergency shelters are forced to reduce their services due to lack of funding, more individuals will be left without options, increasing strain on emergency rooms, law enforcement, and social services. These are costlier and far less humane alternatives.

Since the last ESHAP increase in 2016, the lack of affordable housing has driven up the average length of a shelter stay by 59%. While permanent housing is the ultimate solution, we must sustain our limited shelter beds now to prevent immediate harm.

LD 698 does not attempt to solve every challenge, but it makes a strategic, targeted increase to a funding stream that already exists — one that has proven its effectiveness but has not kept pace with rising demand. This bill is a practical, fiscally responsible step to prevent shelter closures and ensure that Maine's emergency response system remains functional.

The Legislature has had opportunities to strengthen this funding, yet previous attempts have not come to fruition. We cannot afford another missed opportunity.

I urge you to support and fully fund LD 698 to stabilize Maine's emergency shelter system and provide immediate relief to those in crisis. Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions.

Sincerely,

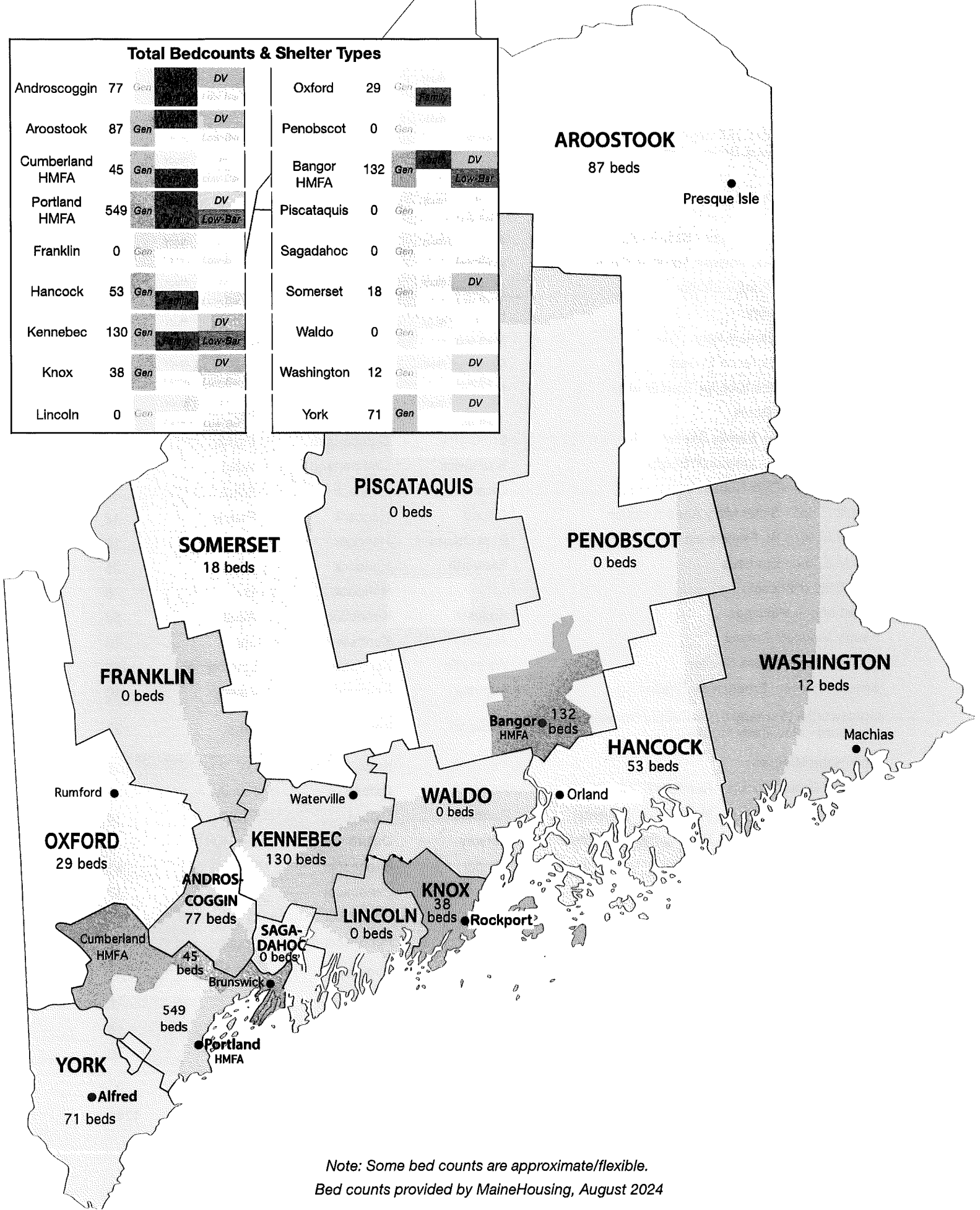
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rachel Talbot Ross'.

**Rachel Talbot Ross**  
State Senator, District 28  
*Representing part of Portland and Peaks Island*

# Emergency Shelters by HMFA / County

HMFA = HUD Metro Fair Market Rent Area

Total Bedcounts & Shelter Types		
Androscoggin	77	Gen, DV
Aroostook	87	Gen, DV
Cumberland HMFA	45	Gen, DV
Portland HMFA	549	Gen, DV, Low-Bar
Franklin	0	Gen
Hancock	53	Gen, DV
Kennebec	130	Gen, DV, Low-Bar
Knox	38	Gen, DV
Lincoln	0	Gen
Oxford	29	Gen
Penobscot	0	Gen
Bangor HMFA	132	Gen, DV, Low-Bar
Piscataquis	0	Gen
Sagadahoc	0	Gen
Somerset	18	Gen, DV
Waldo	0	Gen
Washington	12	Gen, DV
York	71	Gen, DV



Note: Some bed counts are approximate/flexible.  
 Bed counts provided by MaineHousing, August 2024

## Emergency Shelters That Receive MaineHousing Funding

Program	City	County	Type	Beds
New Beginnings	Lewiston	Androscoggin	Youth	24
Rumford Group Homes - Nancy Boggan Family Center	Leeds	Androscoggin	Family	12
Rural Community Action Ministries	Leeds	Androscoggin	Family	10
Safe Voices		Androscoggin	DV	31
Homeless Services of Aroostook - Sr. Mary O'Donnell Shelter & Aroostook Bridge program	Presque Isle	Aroostook	Adult	49
Hope and Justice Project	Caribou, Houlton, Fort Kent	Aroostook	DV	34
The Northern Light House - Safe Harbor	Mars Hill	Aroostook	Youth	4
City of Portland - Homeless Services Center	Portland	Cumberland	Adult	258
City of Portland Family Shelter	Portland	Cumberland	Family	146
Milestone Recovery	Portland	Cumberland	Low barrier	36
Preble Street - Elena's Way	Portland	Cumberland	Low barrier	40
Preble Street - Florence House	Portland	Cumberland	Low barrier	25
Preble Street - Joe Kreisler Teen Shelter	Portland	Cumberland	Youth	28
Through These Doors		Cumberland	DV	16
Tedford Housing - Family Shelter	Brunswick	Cumberland	Family	29
Tedford Housing - Individual Shelter	Brunswick	Cumberland	Adult	16
H.O.M.E. Inc - Dorr House	Orland	Hancock	Adult	6
H.O.M.E. Inc - Sister Mary Ahearn House	Orland	Hancock	Family	12
H.O.M.E. Inc - St. Francis Inn	East Orland	Hancock	Adult	10
H.O.M.E. Inc - Emmaus	Ellsworth	Hancock	Adult	25
Next Step (Hancock)		Hancock	DV	6
Bread of Life Ministries	Augusta	Kennebec	Adult	54
Family Violence Project	Augusta	Kennebec	DV	16
Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter	Waterville	Kennebec	Low barrier	50
Sisters in Arms - Emergency Shelter	Augusta	Kennebec	Family	10
Homeworthy (formerly Knox County Homeless Coalition) - Hospitality House	Rockport	Knox	Adult	22
New Hope Midcoast		Knox	DV	16
Rumford Group Homes - Rumford Family Center	Rumford	Oxford	Family	15
Rumford Group Homes - Monier Family Center	Rumford	Oxford	Family	14
Rumford Group Homes - Norway Family Center	Norway	Oxford	Family	
Bangor Area Homeless Shelter	Bangor	Penobscot	Adult	43
Partners for Peace		Penobscot	DV	17
PCHC- Hope House	Bangor	Penobscot	Low barrier	56
Shaw House	Bangor	Penobscot	Youth	16
Family Violence Project		Somerset	DV	18
NextStep (Washington)		Washington	DV	6
Caring Unlimited		York	DV	18
York County Shelter Programs, Inc. - Family Shelter	Sanford	York	Adult	16
York County Shelter Programs, Inc. - Individual Shelter	Alfred	York	Adult	37
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1241</b>

*Notes: City locations for DV shelters are redacted. Some bed counts are approximate/flexible.*

*Bed counts provided by MaineHousing, August 2024*