

State of Maine - 132nd Legislature

Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development  
Testimony of Molly Feeney on behalf of Homeworthy (Rockport, Maine)

March 18, 2025

**Supporting LD698, "An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine"**

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and honorable members of the joint committee on Housing and Economic Development. I am here today to speak in favor of LD 698

My name is Molly Feeney, and I serve as the Executive Director of Homeworthy-a multi-pronged homeless service agency out of Knox County.

Thanks to many of you on this committee, and your extended colleagues- shelter leaders around the state of Maine are holding onto a slice of hope that with your help we will be able to sustain the operations of our essential emergency shelter beds.

I have had the privilege of working with a number of these great leaders for the past many months. While each of our stories have unique characters, different settings, varying types of shelters, and different constructs of funding stacks- we all share one overwhelming factor... the looming fear of coming up short.

As I walked off campus, I asked one of our guests what this shelter means to them, and their answer was swift and simple. Hope.

My role here today is to provide you with a snapshot of our roadmap and rationale behind this bill; and then you will hear from a far more important and organized lineup of stakeholders.

First off, it is important to note that the funding increase proposed within this bill does not assume the majority responsibility for shelter operational funding, the truth is, just as the Good Senator shared it moves the sum total operational contribution from 7% to 19% of total average costs. A shift that can arguably be understood as a response to inflation and rising costs- bringing us closer to baseline after 9 years of flat funding.

As we calculated the appropriate monetary ask within this bill, we looked at budgets and budget deficits from northernmost Maine, to southern Maine, taking into account regions that are more flush with resources, others that are not, closely evaluating the impact of recent ARPA supplements on each program. Ultimately gaining consensus that this 12% leap in our respective operational shares would release a substantial burden, AND we will still have our work cut out for ourselves- but a much needed release on a pressure valve, which will better position ourselves in the face of an uncertain philanthropic environment.

We stand here in service with you all, with a clear eye on responsibility and conservative budget considerations- thoughtfully carving a funding pathway with the same commitment; this bill cleanly places the funding within an established and monitored system. Earmarking this \$5million to be allocated directly to the operational shares within the ESHAP grant- maximizing the impact on the 1257 beds across the state of Maine. This prevents these funds from getting spread too thin and diluting the impact.

ESHAP, as many of you know is a program that is operated and monitored by MaineHousing. With 41 ESHAP shelters around the state, MaineHousing closely evaluates spending, compliance, best practice, provides technical assistance, and has built in a performance incentive that holds our focus as organizational leaders to ensure we are doing everything we possibly can to move people into housing as quickly as possible.

Despite years of successful and nimble approaches by these steadfast shelter leaders- we stand at an impasse. An impasse brought on by steadily rising costs, and because we are the public health system that bears the most impact from the byproduct of a housing shortage, we pick up the calls from our neighbors who can no longer afford their rent, or from those whose apartment unit was sold, or from the families seeking a safer place to live. We hold this responsibility with grace and unwavering commitment, but we simply cannot do it alone

Thank you for your thoughtful and intentional consideration for this legislation. As I step aside you will hear from a number of dynamic stakeholders on this matter, and we ask that you please pay close attention to the written testimony that will help to shine a light on the story of our whole state.

Note: ***Subsequent pages are notes/testimony written by Homworthy staff and clients***

*My name is Nitelle and I am a current resident at the Hospitality House in Rockport. For those that don't know, the Hospitality House is a family homeless shelter in Rockport Maine, run by Homeworthy. I came to the shelter on 11/2024 after a year spent couch surfing and sleeping in my car.*

*I became homeless after deciding to leave a very abusive marriage in which I was controlled, manipulated, and physically assaulted. My ex-husband would control where and when I worked, how much money I could have, and who I could spend time with. I began to realize how much I didn't want my son to witness this and think that it was how to treat women, and did not want my daughter to grow up with the impression that this is how women should be treated. One night as I was returning home from work late at night, I saw another woman leaving our home. Upset, I went for a drive and in the process one of my tires on my car blew out thanks to my husband neglecting to have them replaced.*

*When I called him for help, he refused to come get me and left me to walk home. I had time to think on the walk, and the next morning I found myself packing up our children and leaving.*

*As I began to navigate the world of homelessness, I realized that while I felt free, I felt very confused. I had no idea who to trust. I had few true supports in my life thanks to my ex controlling who I could be around, and when I did meet people I was very skeptical of them. I spent my time between my parent's home and my car, and the anxiety began to impact my physical ability to go to work consistently. I knew that I needed a change. With help from my Homeworthy caseworker, I was chosen for a spot at the shelter.*

*What I found once I entered the shelter significantly opened my eyes. I especially enjoyed the encouragement and acceptance by staff and other residents. As I settled in, I began to set my sights on goals that I have always wanted to achieve.*

*Over the last four months I have worked hard to overcome the barriers that I was facing in achieving my goals. I have been able to work consistently and am saving money to help purchase a better car as well as to be able to move once I find an affordable place. I have also been saving restitution money that my ex-husband has been court ordered to repay from past taxes that I will be using to take my kids someplace special and enjoy as a family. One of the biggest goals that I have been working on is my GED.*

*I am fortunate to be working, however I wish to be in a better pay bracket so that I can provide the life for myself and my children that I have dreamt of.*

*I am asking that our State officials please consider granting more resources to our local shelters so that more people can have safe places to rebuild themselves. With the help of case management and the housing navigator, I have been able to organize my efforts towards finding housing and improving my education while still maintaining work and being a single parent. The*

*shelter management and staff have provided me with a great deal of encouragement and support. Please consider increasing funding and support to shelters around our state such as the Hospitality House so that they can continue to support people like me getting back on my feet and bettering my life.*

*Sincerely,  
Nitelle Pease*

*My name is Ryan Moody and I am the case manager for the Hospitality House in Rockport Maine. We are a 22 bed shelter designed and licensed to support families and single women in the Midcoast. I work alongside our management team, housing navigator, and shelter staff to identify and attempt to reconcile barriers to people being successfully housed.*

*I have 14 years of social work experience ranging from behavioral and management work at a teen residential program to working with adults and children with severe mental illness to community and shelter case management. This program by far is the most impactful job that I have ever held, both professionally and personally.*

*Many of the clients that I have worked with at the shelter are great people bound by unfortunate circumstances. While there are many stigmas about homelessness and the people that fall victim to it, this program has taught me that more often than not these people are not the stereotype. They are the person that served you your coffee this morning on the way to work, the loving grandmother, the maintenance person that takes care of your office building, or even the medical assistant at your doctor's office that took care of you with compassion, all while not have stability in their housing. One of the biggest roles in my job is to support rectifying stressors in all of the other areas in life that lead to success in housing. Resolving medical, mental health, substance use, financial, educational, transportation, social, and parenting issues through research, referral, and connection to resources is what I routinely do. This happens successfully more often than not thanks to the relationships that I am able to build with my clients by working where they live and being able to be responsive to needs in the moment. As I see the residents daily, comfort and trust is built so that they feel able to come and ask for the help that they need as well as for them to have a source of connection. For a population of people that generally don't have a lot of natural support, this kind of connection can be vital.*

*Another very interesting facet to my job is the fact that I work with many survivors of domestic violence as a middle-aged male provider. Understandably, many are skeptical and downright fearful of working with a male provider due to past experience. Through our time together, we build rapport and comfort to the point where these women feel safe and confident in working with me, which in turn becomes healing and empowers them to stand up to those that are not treating them with the respect and kindness that they are so deserving of. I have no doubt that this would not be the case if they were not able to spend so much time with me and I were just meeting occasionally in the community. As we are a family shelter, this also applies to a great deal of children that are coming from a broken environment.*

*They learn through role modeling that there are safe people that can be providers of help and kindness and not just yelling and abuse, and teaches young boys and girls what a trustworthy male figure and how to treat others with compassion and respect.*

*I know that I am not alone in this line of work. I am fortunate to work in a shelter that generates a fair amount of support through community donations, In fact I coordinate and manage several fundraisers a year to benefit our programming. Not all locations are this lucky. With the costs of*

*running a shelter ever increasing, it is vital that we increase funding to help keep programs such as this running all over our state. It is an investment in our communities so that your favorite server, dental hygienist, painter, or smiling face at the hardware store can continue to rebound from adverse situations and continue to be community staples. I thank you so much for reading.*

*Sincerely,*

*Ryan Moody  
Hospitality House case manager*

Rachael Hendrick  
Youth Transitional Living Program Manager  
Homeworthy  
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03/12/2025

To Whom It May Concern,

As a Youth Residential Program Manager with Homeworthy, I see firsthand how critical it is to secure adequate funding to keep shelters operational across Maine. Shelters are not just a safe place to sleep—they provide a vital lifeline for our most vulnerable community members.

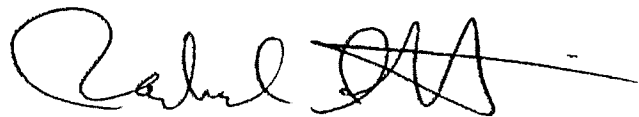
When shelters are underfunded, the consequences can be grim. Without access to these essential resources, individuals are left without a safe space to turn to, which increases their vulnerability to violence, exploitation, and physical and mental health crises. Youth without shelter are especially at risk of substance abuse, trafficking, and long-term instability. Families may face separation, and individuals with mental health challenges can spiral deeper into crisis without the proper support.

Shelters provide far more than emergency housing. They offer vital services such as food, healthcare access, and educational opportunities, which are essential for individuals to rebuild their lives. When shelters are underfunded, these critical services are jeopardized, often leading to even more dangerous situations for those in need. This can contribute to a cycle of homelessness that is harder to break and more costly in the long run.

Without shelters, people in crisis will inevitably seek out alternatives—often in places that are less safe, less supportive, and far more expensive to manage. These individuals may end up in emergency rooms, jails, or other systems that are already stretched thin, putting further strain on public resources and escalating long-term costs. Investing in shelters is not just a matter of providing temporary relief; it's an investment in preventing these higher costs and addressing root causes in a more effective, humane way.

The need for funding to sustain these services has never been more urgent. By ensuring shelters remain well-funded, we can provide a safe space for youth, families, offering them not just survival, but a chance at a better life.

As a community and as a state, we must prioritize funding for these vital services. Acquiring the necessary resources will help ensure shelters remain open, continuing to provide safety, hope, and dignity to those who need it most. Together, we can invest in a future where every person has access to the support they need to thrive, and where we avoid the greater costs of inaction.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rachael Hendrick', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.



# HOMEWORTHY

3/13/2025

To whom it may concern,

Over the last 10 years of working in Social Services it has been evident to both of us that having access to shelter in the state of Maine is critical. At Homeworthy we currently have 115 individuals ranging from newborn to 75 years old on our shelter waitlist, however our shelter, the Hospitality House, can only accommodate 22 individuals or about 7 families at a time. These waitlist numbers only reflect our Knox County service area. Throughout the state of Maine we lack enough emergency shelter beds for the thousands of people struggling with housing. This leads to an inability to provide needed resources to unhoused individuals and families. In recent years we have seen temperatures drop to below -15° and, although our cold months last from November to April, we lack emergency shelters or warming centers which has led to people living and sleeping in cars, tents or on the street. This is a major health and safety concern for our communities, friends and neighbors. There is also limited emergency funding available from local resources. General Assistance is often the only option for emergency shelter funding and those funds are depleted quickly. These funds are also not accessible to individuals under 21 years old yet they still experience homelessness.

During our time working with people who are unhoused we have learned that homelessness can affect anybody. There is no stereotypical homeless person, and getting out of homelessness is not as simple as it may seem. There are so many more layers than just finding a place to live. Over the years we have seen a number of people who are survivors of domestic violence. While fleeing a dangerous situation they often find themselves still in danger with no safe place to go and limited funding to help. More funding for emergency shelters across the state would help alleviate these dangerous situations. Having access to emergency shelters can create safety and stability for individuals and families. Many people in our state are living paycheck to paycheck, while other individuals are receiving a fixed income, and neither can cover the cost of living. It is difficult for multi income families to afford rent and especially difficult for single income families as the housing market in Maine does not reflect the income levels of our state. Most of us in the state are only a few decisions or a medical emergency away from being unhoused ourselves.

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**The Landing Place**

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**Our Mission**

Homeworthy is a 501(c)(3) not for profit, EIN # 46-3136785 in a Knox County Homeless Coalition





# HOMEWORTHY

With more funding for emergency shelters more adults can be supported through services which can help them focus on becoming successfully housed or gaining meaningful employment. We have found that it is very difficult for people to focus on a long term housing goal when they are concerned about surviving **right now**. Housed individuals looking toward the future see in months and years, far down the line, however unhoused individuals can often see only minutes, hours or one day into the future. Instead several questions pass through their minds including "Where will I sleep tonight? How will I get my next meal and how will I eat it? Where do I go? Can I sleep here? Will I be arrested for where I am staying? Am I warm? Am I Safe?" This not only runs through the mind of adults who are experiencing homelessness but it also impacts the mental wellbeing of the children experiencing homelessness. By providing funding to emergency shelters more families can be served and more individuals can focus on their long term needs and goals.

We see the difference everyday at Homeworthy with our wrap around services including housing navigation and case management. This funding not only helps provide shelter, it also helps provide hot meals, stability, financial support, help with medical or mental health needs, transportation, legal resources, and parenting resources. Unhoused individuals who experience this type of support are often successfully housed at a higher rate and remain housed for longer than those who did not have these services. By cutting funding we risk losing vital shelters across the state while the number of unhoused people continues to rise. Supporting folks across the state of Maine is fundamental to successfully housing people and creating a stable life for themselves and their families.

Thank you for your consideration,

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