



Support for LD 698, An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine

3/18/2025

Senator Gere, Representative Curry, and honorable members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee,

My name is Craig Saddlemire, and I am the Development Organizer for the Raise-Op Housing Cooperative in Lewiston, Maine. We own 5 apartment buildings, home to 33 different households, and 90 residents, some of whom are formerly homeless. My testimony today is in support of Support for LD 698, An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine.

As you are all likely aware, homelessness is a growing challenge in our state, fueled by an increasingly unaffordable and unavailable housing market. Over the past five years, the visible evidence of this crisis has surrounded our homes. Just 50 feet behind my home, a homeless encampment caught fire, and were it not for my call to the fire department, it might have claimed the house of my elderly neighbor. I have discovered unhoused people asleep on our properties: in the storage of one of our apartment buildings, in our office basement, and on our exterior emergency egress stairway. I have seen a grown adult person have bathe himself - completely nude - in our driveway. On my 10 minute walk from our apartment buildings to city hall, I can easily count anywhere from 10-30 unhoused people sitting on the sidewalk, in search of help. These examples are not meant to shame anyone - but to help illustrate for those committee members who may reside in wealthier neighborhoods and communities - how visceral the experience of homelessness is both for the unhoused community, as well as the communities who provide services and support for the unhoused. We cannot do it alone.

I have been chairing the City of Lewiston's Shelter Committee, which is currently in the process of supporting the creation of a new low-barrier shelter for unhoused persons of any gender, age 18 and up. In my work on the Shelter Committee, I was shocked and dismayed to learn of how few resources there are for homeless shelters to operate in Maine. The housing crisis is a statewide problem. There is a tremendous pressure on each service community to help the unhoused people from neighboring towns and throughout the surrounding county. The fact that the only reliable state program dedicated to supporting the operating needs of homeless shelters supports just 7% of the operating costs easily explains why shelters are stretched so thin, and similarly why host communities are stretched so thin. LD 698 will help to increase this annual operating support to 19%, which is critical for our shelters to continue to operate. For these reasons, I sincerely request that you move LD 698, "Ought to pass".

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig Saddlemire".

Craig Saddlemire
Cooperative Development Organizer
Raise-Op Housing Cooperative