



ADVOCATES:

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Good afternoon Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the committees on Appropriations and Housing and Economic Development,

I'm Cheryl Harkins. I reside in Westbrook. I have lived experience of unsheltered homelessness due to domestic issues. I am an advocate with Homeless Voices for Justice for that reason. I represent Region 1 at the Statewide Homeless Council and co-chair the People with Lived Experience Committee at the COC. I am here today to ask the Appropriations Committee to approve a 1.5 million subsidy to assist shelters to keep their doors open. In 2025, this committee allotted 4.47 million dollars through LD 698. That allowed most shelters that were on the brink of closure to keep their doors open for another year. In a very short time, many shelters will again be in the same position. Many rural portions of Maine will feel the devastation of shelter closures when there is nowhere to go. Places like Homeless Services of Aroostook, H.O.M.E, inc, and Rumford Group Homes, along with some in service centers like Mid Maine Homeless Shelter will close. Agencies are working with staff, boards, and scared residents who have no alternative to their situation. LD 698 arrived too late to save the York County Adult Shelter. It closed permanently in May 2025. Now in 2026, Rumford Group homes from Oxford County is looking at the same fate. The average cost estimated by Maine Housing for funding a single adult shelter and services is \$102 a night. LD 698 provided a modest temporary increase to \$19 a night. Since 2016, Maine's shelter reimbursement rate remains at \$7.16 per bed per night. When shelters lack funding, more people end up outside, crime increases, emergency room visits and mortality rates rise. These are proven facts. People surviving outdoors struggle to access housing programs designed to help them. Municipal

and public safety costs rise. Outcomes become more tragic and expensive. Keeping shelters open and stable is the only smart, efficient investment. I do boots on the ground advocacy. I am telling you that over 4,000 people are currently homeless in our state. We only have around 1,200 shelter beds, so how are all of these people surviving...or are they?

Please vote ought to pass the 1.5 million addition from the supplemental budget to save some of your constituents' lives.

Thank you for your time. Please remember the people outside.