



# HOMEWORTHY

February 19, 2026

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Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Curry, Representative Gere- and esteemed members of Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Housing and Economic Development.

My name is Molly Feeney, and I serve as the Executive Director at Homeworthy, a comprehensive homeless service agency located in Knox County, with service to Knox, Waldo, and parts of Lincoln Counties. I'm here today in support of the additional \$1.5 M in shelter funding, earmarked in part A (page 78) of the supplemental budget.

It is always a privilege to spend a little time in Augusta and contribute to our public policy process, and yet I stand here with some awareness that I have become a frequent flyer-- with one consistent goal; supporting the survival of our lean emergency shelter system. I have had the privilege of collaborating with shelter leaders across this state for over 16 months-of whom I am proudly representing in this testimony. During this time we have come to understand the unique and critical system we operate within- and we have worked hard to develop creative and thoughtful solutions.

Maine currently has 37 shelters through MaineHousing's Emergency Shelter and Housing Program (ESHAP). Cumulatively this makes up 1,209 bed across the state (with over 4,300 unique individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness). Throughout the past couple years we have all made difficult adjustments when shelter doors are forced to close- due to unmet costs. Each of us stretching our resources, our staff, and physical space to ensure that families and individuals who are displaced from a shelter closure have a safe place to go; in addition to the regular inflow of needs. We are reminded over and over again that homelessness does not adhere to town lines nor can it be solved solely by local response. This is a shared responsibility- the long term solution is safe and affordable housing for all Mainer's- but the journey requires survival. This system as a whole is stretched- and not because we haven't taken on the lion's share of operating costs as community based non-profits- in fact the numbers will show that we have done just that.

After a careful cost study was completed last year, the results showed that the average nightly cost of shelter is \$102/person- The operations share of ESHAP allocates just \$7 dollars and change toward that expense. This 93% funding gap has been bridged by philanthropy, and helpful, but often inconsistent small grant funding. The cost of shelter includes warm safe beds, meals, but importantly it includes critical services that work to ensure our shelter guests are experiencing homelessness for the shortest amount of time possible.

Last year we were fortunate enough to see generous one time funding through LD 698, which successfully buoyed our most vulnerable programs, and as a result every ESHAP shelter is continuing to provide lifesaving shelter through this cold winter. We are deeply grateful for that funding, and at the same time, now face the same cliff. Without the additional ongoing funding, our fragile shelter infrastructure remains at risk.

Throughout the past 16 months we have worked tirelessly and creatively to influence logical, reasonable, and reliable funding contributions. Aside from last year's one time funding, we have not seen an increase from the general fund contribution in a decade- which sits at \$2.5M. Static funding under the best of circumstances is problematic over a 10 year period, yet given our current landscape of cost realities and housing scarcity- static is unsustainable, this will (and has) resulted in programs that simply cannot remain operational.

We are truly grateful to see the ongoing \$1.5M line item proposal in the Governor's budget and urge you to support this critical funding; moreover we would like to specifically ask that this

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**Our Mission:** breaking the cycles of poverty and homelessness in Midcoast Maine  
Homeworthy is a 501©3 Not For Profit, EIN# 46-3136785 fna Knox County Homeless Coalition



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\$1.5M be allocated to the Shelter Operational Share within ESHAP- this designation will ensure that every program operating beds receive the additional supplement.

Just this week we celebrated the milestone of a young woman who spent a period of her adolescence in our shelter, followed by entry into our transitional living program at the age of 19, and she is now moving into home ownership (with the support of Habitat) at just 22 years old. This is how generational patterns shift, in large part because her safety and security during her formative years were protected.

Shelter is a lot of things. A lifeline, a necessary public service, a safe haven, and often a healthy village where patterns are disrupted by support and services. Shelters are essential and necessary. Thank you for helping to support and protect Maine's most vulnerable.

Sincerely,

Molly B. Feeney