

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF LD 698
AN ACT TO SUSTAIN EMERGENCY HOMELESS SHELTERS IN MAINE**

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and the esteemed members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development. My name is Emily Flinkstrom and I am the director of Fair Tide, a nonprofit providing housing and supportive services to people experiencing homelessness. I am testifying on behalf of the York County Committee on Homelessness. Our Committee is comprised of representatives from 16 municipalities and community-based organizations from across York County. We have come together to work collaboratively to address the issue of homelessness in our communities and have been regularly meeting for over a year.

We strongly support LD 698, *An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine*.

Our organizations work closely together every day to address York County's homelessness and affordable housing crises. We have found that to be successful, it is vitally important to address each part of the Housing Continuum – from prevention, to emergency shelter, to housing, and ultimately to homeownership. (For this reason, this Committee also strongly supports, and submitted testimony on, LD 641, *An Act to Support Diversion Efforts to Address Homelessness in Maine*.)

Emergency shelters play an especially critical and lifesaving role in this continuum. While this legislative body has made important investments and passed transformative laws to encourage housing development, it takes time to see the impact of those wins. In the meantime, demand for housing far exceeds supply, creating an unhealthy and stagnant system. Individuals and families who find themselves homeless are staying in our emergency shelters for longer and heavily relying on this resource as the only option for a safe, warm roof over their heads. Without additional financial support, a number of our shelters will close, and we will see an increase in unsheltered homelessness. This will have deep, far reaching, and expensive consequences for all communities in Maine, not to mention the devastating impact it will have on our friends and neighbors impacted by a loss of housing.

In York County we have one adult emergency shelter, one family emergency shelter and one domestic violence emergency shelter (run by two agencies and both are ESHAP providers). All shelters were overcapacity the entire winter to ensure that any person who was in need of and willing to come into shelter was safe. Our emergency shelters were also an integral part of helping the Cities of Sanford and Biddeford resolve local encampments – providing access to substance use disorder treatment, emergency shelter, and housing to all who were willing to participate.

As Maine's housing supply increases, shelter staff will continue to play the critical role of moving folks into housing and providing the support to keep them stable. Our emergency shelters are designed to be the entry point to housing and stability. They are the source of hope, support and new beginnings for Mainers who are struggling. They are, and will continue to be, an integral part of the solution to getting our housing continuum moving and healthy again.

For these reasons, we urge you to support LD 698 which will help stabilize our shelters by bringing the investment from the State of Maine from the current \$7.16 per bed night to \$19. While this is still only a portion of the \$102 per bed night cost to run Maine's emergency shelters, it will help stabilize this vital part of our system.

I, and my fellow members of the York County Committee on Homelessness are more than happy to engage in further conversation and offer additional information on this topic if that would be helpful in your deliberations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Emily F". The "F" is stylized with a long horizontal stroke.

Emily Flinkstrom
Executive Director, Fair Tide
Co-Founder, Mainspring

On behalf of the York County Committee on Homelessness:

York County municipalities: Biddeford, Eliot, Kennebunk, Kennebunkport, Kittery, Old Orchard Beach, Saco and Sanford

York County community-based organizations: Caring Unlimited, Fair Tide, Sanford Housing Authority, Seeds of Hope, Southern Maine Agency on Aging, York Community Service Association, York County Community Action Corporation, York County Shelter Programs