



CUMBERLAND COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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SHERIFF
- Brian R. Pellerin
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Phone (207)774-1444 – fax (207)828-2373

Date: March 17, 2025

To: Senator Curry
Representative Gere

From: Chief Deputy Brian Pellerin,

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 698

Good afternoon Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and esteemed Committee on Housing and Economic Development members.

I am Chief Deputy Brian Pellerin of the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office and wish to speak in support of LD 698, An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine. As a law enforcement official for Cumberland County and a police officer in Maine for over 30 years, we know that shelters keep unhoused individuals off the streets and provide safe places to sleep rather than on sidewalks, along roadsides or in parks and public spaces. We also can attest that shelter costs are more cost-effective than the criminal justice system.

LD 698 provides \$5 million toward the operating costs of emergency homeless shelters. Maine's shelter network is on the front lines of our state's housing crisis, and shelters provide initial emergency care and support, such as emergency rooms do for our healthcare system. Many shelters have been running large deficits and may be forced to close life-saving beds if they cannot secure additional funding. Currently, the state subsidizes only 7% of the cost necessary to operate a bed for one night, and shelters must identify additional funding sources to make up the other 93% of the cost.

Cumberland County is Maine's most populated county and the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office operates the largest jail facility in the state. Although we can provide shelter, food, and medical services to those in our custodial care, our goal is always to release those in our custody, many of which are homeless, to a stable environment and in better condition than we received them. We work hand in hand with our community partners through our re-entry program, as we try to find solutions for housing, mental health and medical services once released back into the community. Unfortunately, jails are very expensive short term solutions to many long term problems.

Emergency shelters are critical bridges back into housing once an individual becomes homeless. At an emergency shelter, individuals can access housing navigation support and other services that will help them rebuild their lives. It is much more difficult for social service agencies to offer these services when the individual they are working with is sleeping outside or couch surfing. If shelters are forced to close, encampments will likely reemerge. And people may end up in our county jails. Jails should not be de facto homeless shelters.



Emergency homeless shelters play a vital role in our communities, especially during a housing crisis, so I urge you to support LD 698.

Thank you.

Respectfully,



Brian R. Pellerin
Chief Deputy
Cumberland County Sheriff's Office

