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March 18, 2025

Re: LD 698, An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM. CHOM's small staff works collaboratively to create housing enriched with services to help people overcome challenges.

I am testifying in strong support of LD 698, An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine. *This bill provides ongoing funds to support emergency homeless shelters in the State - \$5,000,000 in each year of the biennium.*

Emergency shelters depend upon a variety of funding streams, that even when combined do not cover the cost of providing shelter. And, with additional shelter beds added to our system, the already insufficient funding has been stretched even thinner.

Shelters haven't had enough resources to maintain sufficient capacity and staffing to meet the need for years. Our shelters are in crisis. For Maine to safely meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness, we must have a robust, adequately funded shelter system – it is the foundation of our homeless service system.

Shelters in Maine have been full, operating overflow shelters, and/or forced to turn people away due to insurmountable capacity issues for years. And they are currently operating at large annual deficits – some as high as \$855,000. Without additional funding allocations emergency shelters in Maine will close – some imminently (*please see the attached document for additional information*).

We need all of Maine's shelters to remain open, or we will most certainly see an exponential growth in encampments.

Maine is already on the precipice of widespread unsheltered homelessness. We experienced this briefly in 2023. Our shelter system is currently full, and it is starting to overflow. If shelters close or lose capacity, it will leave people with no choice but to congregate outside.

Encampments are not good for any city or town. Access to shelter and housing is.

It is extremely challenging to house people when they are outside because they are overwhelmed trying to survive each day and night. Having a shelter system with sufficient capacity allows the focus to shift from keeping people alive while outdoors (managing a life-threatening crisis) to housing people and keeping them housed (ending homelessness).

Emergency shelters provide a foundation from which people can be safe and focus on the complicated work of getting housed. Shelter staff are successful in assisting people with paperwork, and all the forms and appointments necessary to qualify for affordable housing.

Getting people housed creates cost savings for local, county, and state governments. People who are chronically homeless are up to 29 times more likely to be in the hospital and up to 57 times more likely to be in jail than when unhoused than when housed. It is 27 times more expensive to be in the hospital and 4 times more expensive to be in jail than in housing.



Please also consider expensive and deadly health outcomes: According to 2023 state overdose data, 73 people died of overdoses within the homeless population versus 533 who died of overdoses within the 1.395 million population of Maine. That meant that a person was 32 times more likely to die of a fatal overdose if unhoused than if housed. People are more likely to die of a fatal overdose in an encampment than they are in a supervised shelter. And encampments create other problems beyond a much higher risk of overdose.

Encampments are miserable and hopeless places where people who do not feel good about themselves experience trauma and take enormous risks. People are more apathetic about living when they are in these kinds of desperate circumstances, and that affects their decision making, and has health consequences. People are more likely to participate in risky behaviors that can lead to contracting dangerous and potentially lifelong illnesses, such as Hepatitis C and HIV, when in an encampment than they are in a supervised shelter.

In 2024, 14 people in the entrenched Bangor encampment contracted HIV and that same group of 14 also contracted Hepatitis C. According to state DHHS data, it costs \$30,000 for a one-time Hepatitis C treatment – a generally successful cure for Hepatitis C. The treatment for HIV is \$36,000 annually *in perpetuity*.

A robust emergency shelter system brings people indoors so that people experiencing homelessness in Maine can be better served in their communities. This is how Maine will end homelessness. But we need our shelters to have the funding needed to keep their doors open in order to do so.

This Administration and the Legislature have made important investments in housing and ending homelessness – thank you. But the current situation is dire, and an additional injection of resources is vital.

Please support LD 698 and any other bill that would provide additional shelter funding, so we can ensure emergency shelters across Maine can continue to operate so we can all work together to end and prevent homelessness in Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

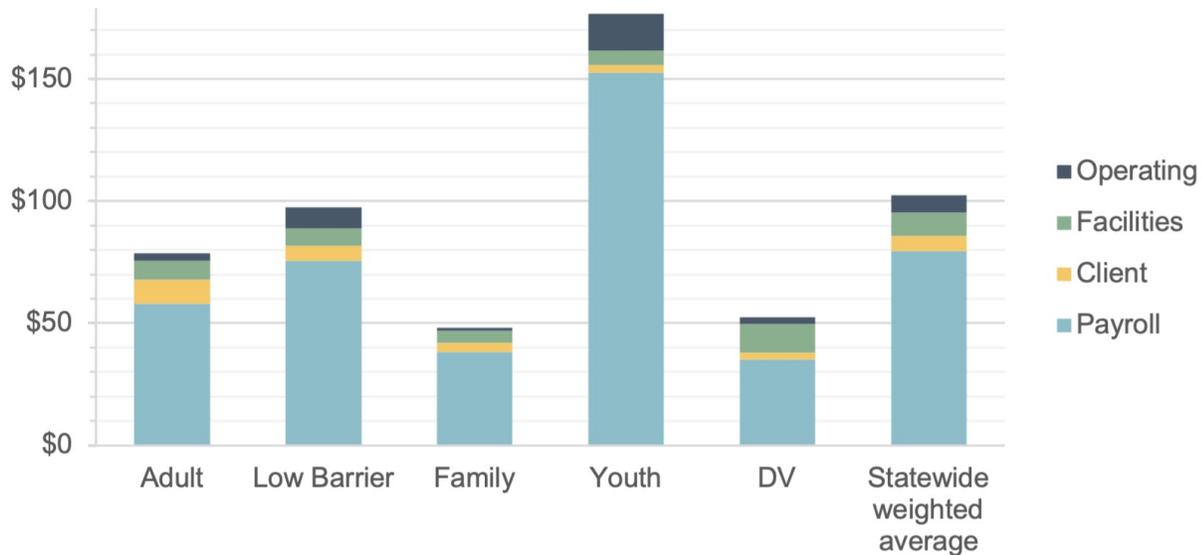
Emergency Shelters Funding

About the Shelter Network - 41 shelters in 12 counties receive funding from MaineHousing's Emergency Shelter and Housing Assistance Program (ESHAP ; see shelter map attached)

State of Maine Shelter Cost Study

- MaineHousing conducted a study to understand the actual cost of providing shelter & associated supports, for people experiencing homelessness in Maine.
- Shelter costs varied by type of shelter and by geographic region.
- \$102 per bednight is the the average cost estimated across all ESHAP shelters:

Average Shelter Bednight Cost, by Shelter Type



Emergency Shelter and Housing Assistance Program (ESHAP) - Basics

Sources	MM
HUD Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG)	\$1.3
State General Fund	\$2.5
Housing Opportunities for Maine (HOME) Fund	\$3.5
TOTAL	\$7.3

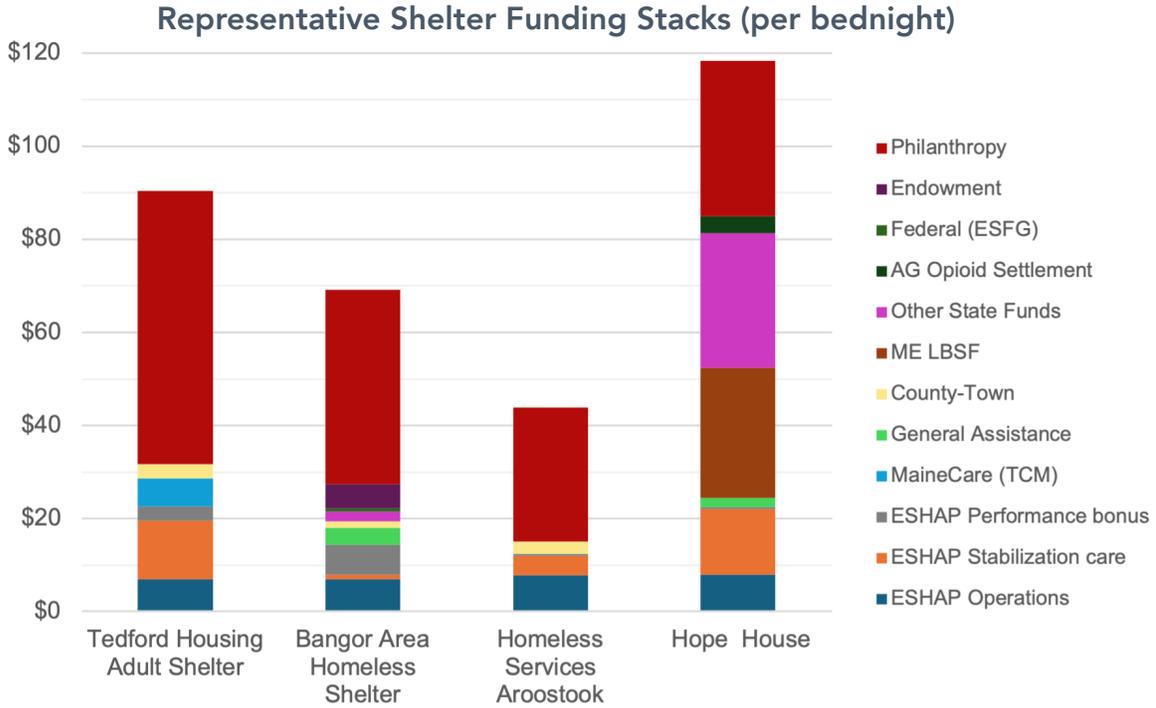
- General Fund to ESHAP has been flat since 2016

Uses	MM	Share
Shelter Operations	\$3.28	45%
Stabilization Care	\$3.28	45%
Performance bonus	\$0.73	10%
TOTAL	\$7.3	100%

- Stabilization is also spread among non-shelter agencies.
- Operations subsidy is **\$7.16** / bednight on ave.

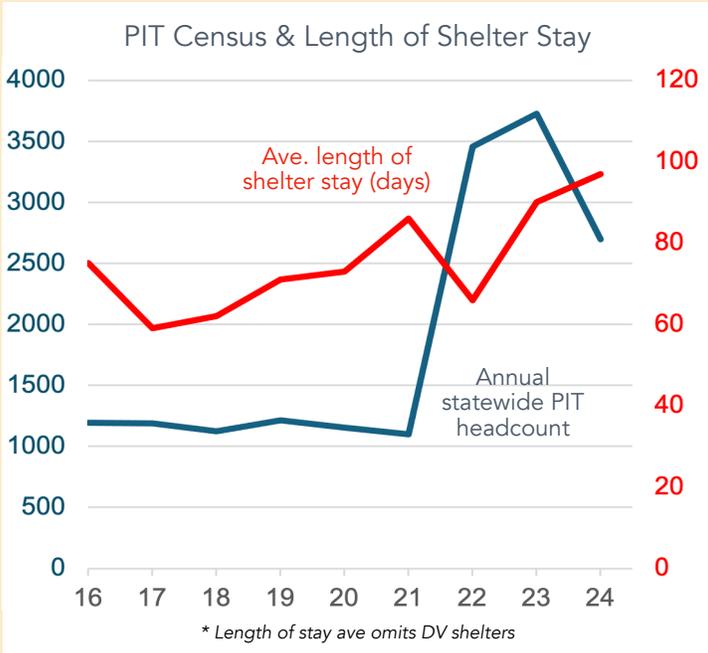
Emergency Shelters Funding

How It's Paid For - The Operations subsidy leaves 93% of costs to be raised from other sources. Funding stacks vary widely among shelter programs:



Shelters Face Unsustainable Pressure

- Lack of affordable housing means homelessness is more prevalent and lasts longer (see graph).
- Beds have been added to network, diluting ESHAP further.
- Several shelters are running large deficits, adding to ongoing uncertainty.



An Act to Sustain Emergency Shelters

- LD 698 would add \$5M annually to the shelter Operations subsidy (SOS).
- Operations subsidy would increase to **\$19 / bednight** on average.
- LD 698 is the top legislative priority of Shelter Directors in the 132nd legislature

Current/Last Year Shelter Deficits (not exhaustive)

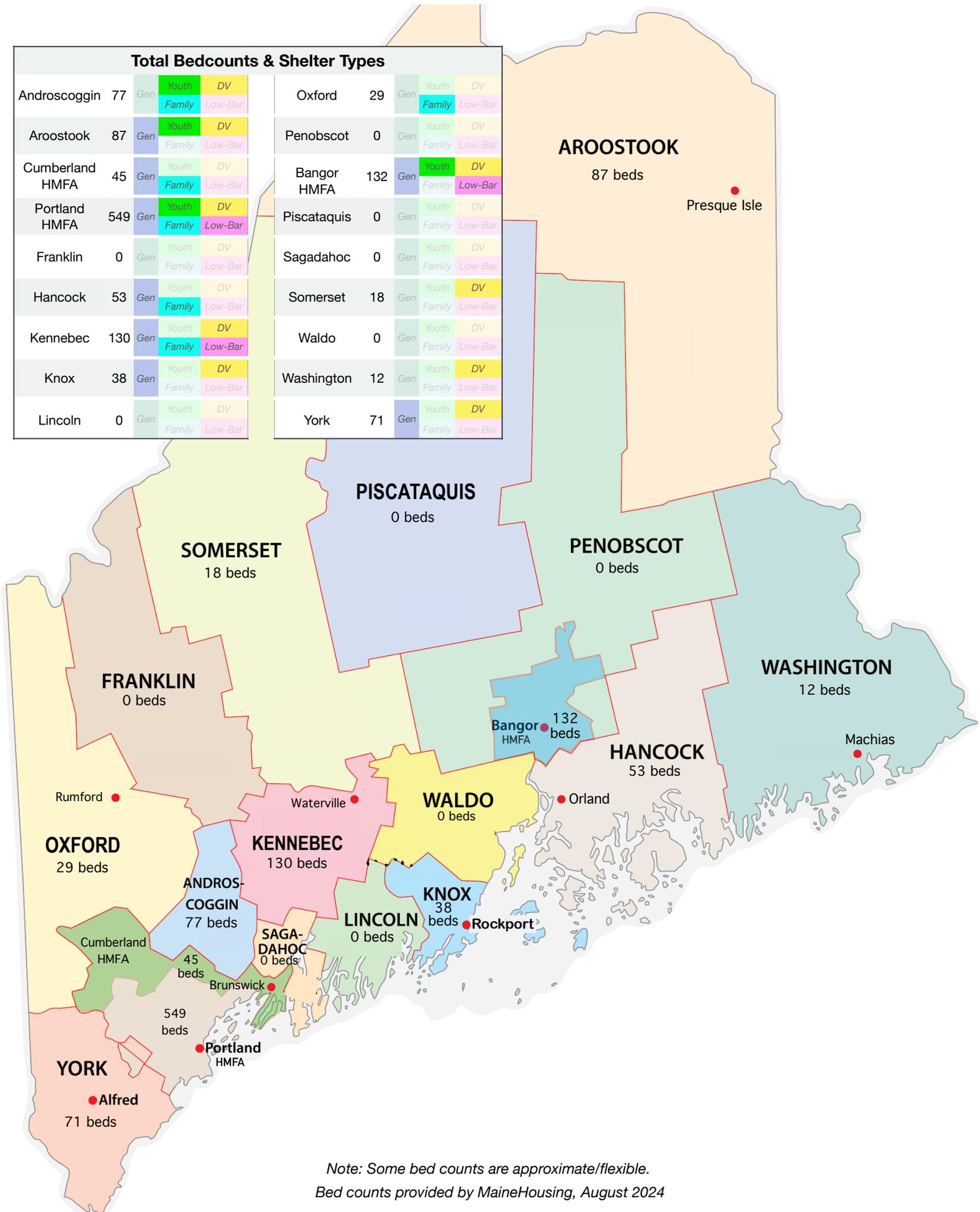
Bangor Area Homeless Shelter	\$31K
Homeless Services of Aroostook	\$275K
Rumford Group Homes	\$140K
York County Shelter Programs	\$600K
H.O.M.E. Inc	\$855K

Questions?
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 207-649-7602 207-319-0295

Emergency Shelters by HMFA / County

HMFA = HUD Metro Fair Market Rent Area

Total Bedcounts & Shelter Types										
Androscoggin	77	Gen	Youth	DV		Oxford	29	Gen	Youth	DV
			Family	Low-Bar					Family	Low-Bar
Aroostook	87	Gen	Youth	DV		Penobscot	0	Gen	Youth	DV
			Family	Low-Bar					Family	Low-Bar
Cumberland HMFA	45	Gen	Youth	DV		Bangor HMFA	132	Gen	Youth	DV
			Family	Low-Bar					Family	Low-Bar
Portland HMFA	549	Gen	Youth	DV		Piscataquis	0	Gen	Youth	DV
			Family	Low-Bar					Family	Low-Bar
Franklin	0	Gen	Youth	DV		Sagadahoc	0	Gen	Youth	DV
			Family	Low-Bar					Family	Low-Bar
Hancock	53	Gen	Youth	DV		Somerset	18	Gen	Youth	DV
			Family	Low-Bar					Family	Low-Bar
Kennebec	130	Gen	Youth	DV		Waldo	0	Gen	Youth	DV
			Family	Low-Bar					Family	Low-Bar
Knox	38	Gen	Youth	DV		Washington	12	Gen	Youth	DV
			Family	Low-Bar					Family	Low-Bar
Lincoln	0	Gen	Youth	DV		York	71	Gen	Youth	DV
			Family	Low-Bar					Family	Low-Bar



Note: Some bed counts are approximate/flexible.
Bed counts provided by MaineHousing, August 2024

Emergency Shelters That Receive MaineHousing Funding

Program	City	County	Type	Beds
New Beginnings	Lewiston	Androscoggin	Youth	24
Rumford Group Homes - Nancy Boggan Family Center	Leeds	Androscoggin	Family	12
Rural Community Action Ministries	Leeds	Androscoggin	Family	10
Safe Voices		Androscoggin	DV	31
Homeless Services of Aroostook - Sr. Mary O'Donnell Shelter & Aroostook Bridge program	Presque Isle	Aroostook	Adult	49
Hope and Justice Project	Caribou, Houlton, Fort Kent	Aroostook	DV	34
The Northern Light House - Safe Harbor	Mars Hill	Aroostook	Youth	4
City of Portland - Homeless Services Center	Portland	Cumberland	Adult	258
City of Portland Family Shelter	Portland	Cumberland	Family	146
Milestone Recovery	Portland	Cumberland	Low barrier	36
Preble Street - Elena's Way	Portland	Cumberland	Low barrier	40
Preble Street - Florence House	Portland	Cumberland	Low barrier	25
Preble Street - Joe Kreisler Teen Shelter	Portland	Cumberland	Youth	28
Through These Doors		Cumberland	DV	16
Tedford Housing - Family Shelter	Brunswick	Cumberland	Family	29
Tedford Housing - Individual Shelter	Brunswick	Cumberland	Adult	16
H.O.M.E. Inc - Dorr House	Orland	Hancock	Adult	6
H.O.M.E. Inc - Sister Mary Ahearn House	Orland	Hancock	Family	12
H.O.M.E. Inc - St. Francis Inn	East Orland	Hancock	Adult	10
H.O.M.E. Inc - Emmaus	Ellsworth	Hancock	Adult	25
Next Step (Hancock)		Hancock	DV	6
Bread of Life Ministries	Augusta	Kennebec	Adult	54
Family Violence Project	Augusta	Kennebec	DV	16
Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter	Waterville	Kennebec	Low barrier	50
Sisters in Arms - Emergency Shelter	Augusta	Kennebec	Family	10
Homeworthy (formerly Knox County Homeless Coalition) - Hospitality House	Rockport	Knox	Adult	22
New Hope Midcoast		Knox	DV	16
Rumford Group Homes - Rumford Family Center	Rumford	Oxford	Family	15
Rumford Group Homes - Monier Family Center	Rumford	Oxford	Family	14
Rumford Group Homes - Norway Family Center	Norway	Oxford	Family	
Bangor Area Homeless Shelter	Bangor	Penobscot	Adult	43
Partners for Peace		Penobscot	DV	17
PCHC- Hope House	Bangor	Penobscot	Low barrier	56
Shaw House	Bangor	Penobscot	Youth	16
Family Violence Project		Somerset	DV	18
NextStep (Washington)		Washington	DV	6
Caring Unlimited		York	DV	18
York County Shelter Programs, Inc. - Family Shelter	Sanford	York	Adult	16
York County Shelter Programs, Inc. - Individual Shelter	Alfred	York	Adult	37
			TOTAL	1241

Notes: City locations for DV shelters are redacted. Some bed counts are approximate/flexible.

Bed counts provided by MaineHousing, August 2024