

Madeleine Weatherhead

LD 698

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and esteemed members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee,

My name is Madeleine Weatherhead, and I'm a resident of Portland, Maine.

I'm writing to support LD 698: An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine.

Maine's emergency shelters provide critical care and services to vulnerable individuals and families. With the growing homelessness crisis in our state, shelters across Maine are struggling to match the need, leaving far too many people no choice but to sleep outside and in places not meant for human habitation. If even one shelter closes, it will strain an already overburdened system and worsen this crisis, leaving more people to compete for fewer resources, including shelter beds, housing navigators, and critical life-saving services.

MaineHousing reports that a shelter bed in Maine costs \$102 a night. This cost not only covers a bed, but the support services that shelters provide. As someone who has worked at an emergency shelter in Portland, I can attest that having a safe place to stay and access to housing navigation and other services are crucial to people having the stability and support they need to move out of homelessness.

Currently the state's Shelter Operating Subsidy only provides Maine emergency shelters with \$7 a bed per night. This figure has remained the same since 2016, meanwhile Maine's emergency shelters have faced rising costs from inflation and had to expand services to keep communities safe during the pandemic. LD 698 will critically increase this contribution to \$18 a bed per night, helping to ensure Maine's emergency shelters remain open, accessible, and professionally operated.

Maine needs and deserves safe and accessible emergency shelters that can meet the needs of the growing number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in our state. LD 698 will help to make this a reality.

Thank you,

Madeleine Weatherhead