



19 Colby Street
Waterville

Mid-Maine
Homeless Shelter
& Services

Hope Starts Here
www.shelterme.org

Waterville, ME
04901

MID-MAINE HOMELESS SHELTER & SERVICES

DR. KATIE SPENCER WHITE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
(207) 872-8082 ♦ (207) 872-6550 ♦ FAX: (207) 872-0834
shelter@ShelterMe.org ♦ www.shelterme.org

March 18, 2025

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

Re: LD641 An Act to Support Diversion Efforts to Prevent Homelessness in Maine

I am writing in support of LD641. I lead the Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter & Services (MMHSS) and we have operated a very effective Diversion program in central Maine for more than three years. It is easily one of the best things we've ever done.

Diversion is part of a continuum of interventions to prevent and end homelessness. At one end of the continuum is Housing First which is permanent housing and services for people who are chronically homeless. It cannot and does not serve all people at risk of or who actually become homeless.

Most people need a lighter touch than Housing First and Diversion is at the top of the list of possible interventions. There are many types of diversion, from structural diversion programs like guaranteed basic income, to system diversion and eviction prevention.¹ The program this bill funds focuses on early intervention, which occurs right at the moment someone is on the brink of or has become literally homeless.

In this model, there are two elements: housing positive conversations and diversion funding. The conversations are the most important part because they allow individuals to quickly develop solutions to a crisis that meet their criteria for success. Individuals work with trained case workers who help them identify strengths and resources, and develop plans to prevent repeat trigger events.

Diversion funding catalyzes these conversations and is one of the most efficient and effective tools we have to combat rising homelessness. At its best, it keeps people housed and engages households in developing plans for greater self-sufficiency. During the three years we have operated a diversion program we have kept over 500 households out of the homeless shelter system, with an average cost of just under \$300 per person.

At MMHSS, diversion funding allowed us to transform how we operate. Today a trained social worker answers our phones and immediately triages incoming calls to see who can be diverted and who will

“Providing Emergency Food & Shelter to Homeless and Displaced Persons in central Maine”
“Founded by the Interfaith Council in 1990”

need a bed at the shelter. Diversion stabilizes at-risk tenancies by paying back rent or CMP arrearages. It's a rapid response tool that keeps people in their homes or quickly gets them to a place of safety.

My favorite diversion story involves a young adult who hadn't called home in years. Our case worker quickly helped them identify a grandparent out of state. The young adult was worried their grandmother would not welcome their phone call. But when the case worker reached out, the grandmother was overjoyed to hear from this prodigal grandchild. One day and one bus ticket later, and that young person was back home, safe, sound, and well-fed for the first time in years.

There are some budget items that should give this committee pause. This shouldn't be one of them. This money will be used effectively and efficiently, and it will transform lives. I urge you not to overthink this and vote ought to pass.

Kind regards,



Dr. Katie Spencer White
President & CEO
Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter & Services

katie@shelterme.org

(207) 692-4421

1 Oudshoorn, A., Dej, E., Parsons, C., & Gaetz, S. (2020). Evolving an evidence-based model for homelessness prevention. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 28(5), 1754-1763.

“Providing Emergency Food & Shelter to Homeless and Displaced Persons in central Maine”
“Founded by the Interfaith Council in 1990”