

jason goodrich
Brewer
LD 641

Dear Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development,

I am writing to express my strong support for LD 641, An Act to Support Diversion Efforts to Address Homelessness in Maine. Diversion strategies are critical to preventing individuals and families from entering the shelter system by identifying immediate alternative housing solutions, and this bill can greatly enhance those efforts.

Diversion programs in Bangor have already demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach. For instance, the Bangor Area Homeless Shelter (BAHS) runs an Intake and Diversion Program that helps individuals and families avoid homelessness by connecting them with resources such as rent assistance, utility bill support, and short-term housing options. In August 2024 alone, the program successfully diverted eight people from entering the shelter system, which was already at capacity. Since the program's launch in 2021, it has helped over 100 people avoid homelessness, allowing the shelter to focus its resources on those who have no other options (newscentermaine.com).

Additionally, the City of Bangor's Rental Assistance Program, formerly known as Shelter Plus Care, is another example of successful diversion. This program helps chronically homeless individuals and families find stable housing by offering rental assistance. Since its inception, it has successfully housed 243 participants, with 46 new households placed as recently as October. This program ensures that people with complex needs, such as mental illness or substance use disorder, are able to maintain stable housing, further reducing their reliance on shelters (bangormaine.gov).

On a personal note, I know firsthand that diversion services would have been invaluable during the times I experienced homelessness myself. The ability to access immediate financial assistance, mediation services, or even just guidance on alternative housing options could have helped me avoid some of the most difficult and destabilizing moments of my life. If programs like these had been widely available at the time, my path to stability might have been shorter and less traumatic. No one should have to navigate homelessness alone, and diversion efforts offer an opportunity to intervene before people reach a crisis point.

The reality is that emergency shelters are not solutions to homelessness—they are warehouses where people often get stuck. Once inside the system, it becomes harder to escape. Without targeted diversion efforts, individuals cycle through shelters, hospitals, jails, and other crisis services that are far more expensive and far less effective than stable housing. Shelters were never meant to be long-term solutions, yet too often, people languish in them with no clear pathway out. This approach isn't just inhumane—it's expensive.

These efforts in Bangor highlight the importance of diversion in homelessness prevention. By addressing the underlying issues and providing immediate housing alternatives, these programs reduce the strain on shelters and help individuals avoid the trauma of homelessness.

I urge the committee to support LD 641, as it will strengthen these existing diversion efforts and provide even more opportunities for Maine's communities to proactively address homelessness before it begins.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jason Goodrich
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