



CITY OF BANGOR

Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

Testimony in Support of LD 748 – An Act to Increase Bridging Rental Assistance Program Housing Voucher Funding to Reduce the Current Partial Waiting List and Increase Housing Vouchers for Persons Living with Mental Health Challenges

March 25, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, I am Deborah Laurie, City Manager of the City of Bangor. On behalf of the Bangor City Council, I am providing testimony in support of LD 748, “An Act to Increase Bridging Rental Assistance Program Housing Voucher Funding to Reduce the Current Partial Waiting List and Increase Housing Vouchers for Persons Living with Mental Health Challenges.”

Through the creation and funding of the Bridging Rental Assistance Program (BRAP), the State recognized and acknowledged that access to safe, decent, and affordable housing is a medical necessity for many persons with serious mental health challenges, including those with substance use disorder. For many, homelessness becomes a symptom of the toll those challenges can take on one’s ability to simply survive.

In a crushing blow toward progress and stability for many, on March 24 a full pause on new applications for BRAP went into effect. Citing rising rental rates, increased program costs, and higher demand for housing subsidies – all increasing at unprecedented levels – resulted in the Program effectively being shuttered to ensure those currently housed via the Program can remain so.

The effects this pause will have further compound our stagnated homeless response system, when those who previously qualified for assistance due to literal homelessness were waitlisted in March of 2024. Our successes are measured largely by the numbers of people being diverted from or exiting the homeless services continuum into housing. LD 748 is a vehicle to facilitate the assistance needed to help people leaving psychiatric hospitalization, incarceration or those who are literally homeless to access housing.

Housing subsidies, like BRAP, do more than provide financial support to those in need of housing; they allow for diversion from homelessness, and outflow from the homeless services sector, thereby freeing up shelter and transitional housing beds which allows for more people who are unsheltered to come inside. The funding allocated within LD 748 will ensure people currently in the Program remain safely housed and those eligible and in need of securing housing will have opportunities to lease up and gain access to the supports needed to achieve stability.

With the full support of the Bangor City Council, I strongly urge you to support LD 748. Thank you for your consideration, and please do not hesitate to reach out with questions.

Deborah Laurie, City Manager, debbie.laurie@bangormaine.gov

Jena Jones, Homelessness Response Manager, jena.jones@bangormaine.gov

Cara Pelletier, City Council Chair, cara.pelletier@bangormaine.gov