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LD 2124

I am one of the co-chairs of the Lived Experience Committee of the Maine Continuum of Care. I am also a member of the National Coalition for the Homeless and the creator of the Maine Homeless Resource Guide. My work keeps me closely connected to people experiencing homelessness and to the mutual aid groups supporting those living outdoors due to Maine's shortage of approximately 3,000 shelter beds.

I am testifying today in support of LD 2124, An Act to Support Emergency Shelter Funding Using Revenue from the Real Estate Transfer Tax.

I live in York County, where our only emergency shelter closed last year after years of chronic underfunding. Today, both warming centers are consistently full, leaving approximately 300 people in York County with no access to shelter anywhere in the county.

In Sanford, a community-supported mutual aid group partners with a church once a week to provide a hot meal, warmth, and basic supplies—such as hand warmers—to between 40 and 70 people once a week. These are the individuals suffering right now because the York County shelter closed. Even during bitter, life-threatening cold, there is no emergency shelter available, and the city has refused to open even a temporary one.

Many of us have repeatedly contacted the city during these extreme weather conditions. The response we receive is that a warming center was opened three years ago and “no one used it,” therefore no one needs shelter. Current data on the Maine Homeless Planning website proves this claim is inaccurate. What this tells us is that municipalities are not taking responsibility for residents experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Instead, municipalities are incentivized not to provide shelter because they know people will travel to the nearest community that does—most often that is Portland. In doing so, towns like Sanford save money while contributing nothing to the shelters that ultimately serve their residents.

A recent review of data from Portland's shelters shows that between January and September of 2025, 110 people from surrounding towns in Cumberland County and 65 people from York County sought shelter in Portland. None of these towns operates its own shelter, and none provides financial support to Portland's shelter system.

Compounding this problem, I was deeply disturbed to learn last week that the York County Commissioners were unwilling to support funding for emergency shelters. This reinforces a troubling reality: neither municipalities nor counties are taking responsibility for residents experiencing homelessness. As a result, people are left to struggle to survive in life-threatening conditions or forced to find their way to a service city like Portland, which is then left bearing the financial, operational, and human responsibility for people whose home communities refuse to do so.

That is why legislative action is necessary. Passing LD 2124 is an important first step toward ensuring all communities contribute their fair share and that responsibility for homelessness is shared statewide—not shifted onto a few service cities. People are suffering while trying to survive outdoors, and we cannot afford to lose more shelters.

Please pass LD 2124.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.