

Kelly Brown
Washington County
LD 2124

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

My name is Kelly Brown, and I serve as the Executive Director of Next Step Domestic Violence Project. I am writing today in strong support of LD 2124.

Next Step is the only domestic violence shelter serving Washington County. In a rural county with limited infrastructure and high rates of poverty, our shelter is often the only safe option for survivors and their children fleeing abuse. The need for our services has not decreased—if anything, it has intensified—while the cost of maintaining a safe, functional facility has risen dramatically.

Over the past five years, our operational costs have increased substantially. Our electric bills alone have more than tripled. As a 24/7 emergency shelter, we cannot reduce heat, lighting, or basic utilities without compromising safety.

This year alone, we are facing over \$50,000 in necessary repairs. These include addressing chipping paint in older portions of the building, repairing staircases that are no longer safe, and installing critical safety mechanisms in our furnace room to meet compliance and ensure the wellbeing of the families we serve. These are not cosmetic improvements—they are essential to maintaining a safe and habitable environment for survivors and children who have already endured trauma.

Beyond emergency shelter, Next Step provides a comprehensive continuum of services. We operate a 24/7 helpline, offer emergency and transitional housing support, provide court and legal advocacy, assist with protection from abuse orders, engage in systems advocacy with law enforcement and child protective services, and offer prevention education to youth throughout our county. We facilitate Certified Domestic Violence Intervention Programming (CDVIP) to address abusive behavior and enhance community safety. We also support survivors with safety planning, transportation, housing navigation, and connections to vital community resources.

Our shelter is not simply a building. It is a lifeline filled with advocacy and resources with families living in the building 24/7. But without sustainable investment in the physical infrastructure that houses this work, our ability to provide safety is becoming more and more limited.

LD 2124 represents an important step toward ensuring that domestic violence shelters across Maine can maintain safe, compliant, and dignified spaces for survivors. I urge you to support this bill and recognize that maintaining these facilities is foundational to the safety and stability of families in Washington County.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to housing and community safety.