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*Testimony of Rep. Flavia DeBrito in support of*  
**LD 2124, An Act to Support Emergency Shelter Funding Using  
Revenue from the Real Estate Transfer Tax**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development*

Good afternoon, Senator Curry, Representative Gere and members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee. I am Flavia DeBrito, and I represent House District 64, which includes parts of Waterville and Winslow. I am here today in strong support of LD 2124.

I approach this bill as both a legislator and someone who represents a service-center community that sees firsthand what happens when Maine's emergency shelter system is underfunded and unstable. Emergency shelters are not abstract policy concepts; they are essential infrastructure that protect human life, public safety and municipal systems across our state.

One-time funding helped, but only temporarily. The one-year funding increase enacted in 2025 through LD 698 made a real and measurable difference. It allowed shelters across Maine to maintain operations and avoid an immediate crisis. However, it was never intended to be a long-term solution.

Temporary funding provides temporary relief. It does not provide the stability that shelters need to retain staff, plan budgets or maintain capacity year over year. Without a permanent funding mechanism, shelters remain in a constant state of uncertainty, and communities remain at risk.

Maine is already seeing the consequences of instability. We have already seen what happens when emergency shelter systems lack predictable support. In 2025, the York County Adult Shelter closed permanently. That closure did not eliminate the need; it displaced it. Surrounding municipalities, hospitals, law enforcement, EMS and neighboring shelters absorbed the impact.

Now in 2026, other shelters are signaling the same risk. This is not an isolated issue; it is a pattern. Short-term patches lead to temporary relief, followed by renewed crisis and eventual closure. Each closure reduces statewide capacity, increases human suffering and shifts costs onto municipalities and public safety systems that are already stretched thin.

The state's operating subsidy does not reflect real costs. Maine's core shelter operating subsidy has not been updated since 2016. The reimbursement rate of \$7.16 per bed-night bears no relationship to the actual cost of operating a safe, staffed and compliant emergency shelter.

**District 64: Parts of Waterville and Winslow**

MaineHousing estimates the real cost at approximately \$102 per night per bed. The temporary increase provided in 2025 helped close part of that gap, but once again, it was temporary.

This bill creates a permanent, predictable funding structure by dedicating a modest share of the Real Estate Transfer Tax to shelter operations. This is a revenue source that grows with the economy and provides the consistency that responsible planning requires. Stable shelter funding reduces both human and public costs. Emergency shelters are not just moral infrastructure; they are cost-saving infrastructure.

When shelters are underfunded or forced to reduce capacity:

- More people are left outdoors.
- Emergency room visits increase.
- Police, EMS and court costs rise.
- Outcomes become more dangerous and more expensive.

Stable shelter systems reduce strain on public safety, healthcare and municipal budgets. They keep people safer and reduce downstream costs that taxpayers ultimately bear. A regulated, statewide approach matters. State-funded shelters are licensed, inspected and accountable. That structure provides predictability and coordination, which is especially important for municipalities and service-center communities managing regional needs. Emergency shelters serve populations well beyond municipal boundaries. They are a regional and statewide responsibility, and they require a statewide funding solution.

LD 2124 recognizes a simple reality: one-time fixes do not create stability. Maine needs a consistent, long-term funding approach to maintain a functioning emergency shelter system. This bill offers a fiscally responsible way to protect vulnerable Mainers, reduce pressure on municipalities and prevent further shelter closures.

I respectfully urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 2124.

Thank you for your time and consideration.