

Testimony In Support of LD 2124: “An Act to Support Emergency Shelter Funding Using Revenue from the Real Estate Transfer Tax”

Good afternoon Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development. My name is Emily Flinkstrom, and I am submitting this letter today on behalf of a select number of York County Committee on Homelessness members in strong support of LD 2124. I was looking forward to sharing the testimony in person, but due to the delayed start, I had to leave before the hearing began.

The York County Committee on Homelessness is a collaborative group made up of representatives from 16 municipalities and community-based organizations across York County. We have come together to address homelessness as a regional issue—one that does not stop at municipal boundaries and cannot be solved by any single town or organization acting alone. The members signing onto this testimony are listed below.

We are submitting testimony today because York County is experiencing a critical gap in emergency shelter capacity. Last year, the only adult emergency shelter in York County closed, leaving individuals experiencing homelessness with virtually no local shelter option. While the county still has a family shelter, that program is at risk of closing when its current funding runs out this April. York County also has a domestic violence shelter, which plays a vital role in protecting survivors and would benefit directly from additional, stable operating support.

When local shelter capacity disappears, the need does not. Instead, it shifts across the region. Maine benefits from a strong, collaborative network of emergency shelters that regularly work together to support people when capacity is strained in one community. Since the adult shelter in York County closed, neighboring shelters have taken on increased demand, including Cross Roads House in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, shelters in Portland, Maine, and others beyond our immediate region. At the same time, Seeds of Hope Neighborhood Center in Biddeford has seen increased demand for its daytime resource center and overnight services as people seek any available support.

This collaboration is a strength of Maine’s shelter system, but it also underscores how fragile the network has become. When one part of the system weakens, the pressure is absorbed by others that are already operating at or near capacity. LD 2124 recognizes that emergency shelters function as an interconnected statewide system, and that strengthening shelter operations anywhere helps stabilize the network everywhere.

LD 2124 offers an important and timely solution by dedicating a modest portion of the real estate transfer tax to the Maine State Housing Authority’s shelter operating subsidy program. This approach creates a predictable and ongoing funding source that supports the entire shelter network, allowing programs to plan, retain staff, and respond more effectively to increased demand—whether from their own communities or from neighboring regions.

Our Committee is actively working to examine shelter need in York County and to rebuild emergency shelter options for individuals experiencing homelessness. This work takes time and requires thoughtful planning, appropriate facilities, and approved shelter operators. We are

making progress, and it is essential that counties like ours are able to benefit from these operating funds as new or reestablished shelter capacity comes online.

We also recognize that there is some friction regarding the specifics of the funding mechanism and its impact on county budgets. We want to be clear that we do not want these concerns to stall this critical legislation. We strongly encourage the Committee to move LD 2124 forward with the understanding that the Legislature, counties, and state partners will continue working collaboratively to resolve implementation details.

Emergency shelters are a foundational part of Maine's housing response system. When shelters are underfunded or disappear, the consequences ripple outward—to municipalities, emergency rooms, law enforcement, neighboring shelters, and most importantly, to people experiencing homelessness. Conversely, when shelters are adequately supported, they provide safety, dignity, and a bridge to permanent housing.

LD 2124 represents a pragmatic, forward-looking investment in Maine's communities. It does not create a new tax, but instead reinvests a small portion of existing revenue into a system that is clearly under strain. For York County, it offers hope that we can rebuild lost capacity while also easing pressure on our regional partners.

On behalf of the organizations listed below and the residents we serve, we urge this Committee to support LD 2124 and advance it forward. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Emily Flinkstrom, Fair Tide & Mainspring
Diane Small, Sanford Housing Authority
Carter Friend, York County Community Action
Vassie Fowler, Seeds of Hope
Barb Crider, York County Shelter Programs
Susan Giambalvo, Caring Unlimited
Michelle Surdoval, York Community Service Association
Truc Dever, City of Biddeford
Michael Sullivan, Town of Eliot