

United Community Living Center

Housing and Economic Development Committee

February 10, 2026

Members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee,

We are the United Community Living Center, a grassroots nonprofit organization dedicated to improving health access, stability, and wellbeing for unhoused and precariously housed individuals in Augusta. We write to you in support of LD 2124, An Act To Support Emergency Shelter Funding Using Revenue from the Real Estate Transfer Tax.

Emergency shelters are an essential part of our safety net to help our neighbors who are unhoused become housed. In addition to getting people off the street in frigid Maine winters, Augusta's emergency shelter serves as the point of entry for many individuals we serve. While we appreciate the legislature's generosity in passing a funding package in 2025, it has not been enough. The Augusta Emergency Overnight Warming Center required funds from the city to stay open this year. Yet, even with funding covered for this year they are not able to cover the need and are at capacity nightly. This funding would not benefit them directly but would support the other providers in our community that can fill the need for emergency shelter.

We have been witness to the ill effects of people who are not able to shelter there. We see many cases of trench foot, frostbite, and devastating foot wounds in our free clinic. We have had people lose their limbs. We are grateful that the emergency shelters in Augusta have been able to stay open but not every municipality in Maine has been so lucky. Last year saw the closure of York County Adult Shelter. Our cross-state partners report this has had devastating impact in that community. The benefits of a well-funded shelter system are worth highlighting.

Maine data indicates that unhoused homeless are 29 times more likely to be in the hospital and 57 times more likely to be in jail than their housed counterparts.¹ Hospital stays cost well north of thousands of dollars with much of this care being unreimbursed and our struggling hospitals eating the cost of their care. Our struggling hospitals are already operating on razor thin margins with many at risk of closing. This legislation is a win for people who are unhoused, hospitals, and the taxpayers writ large. We urge you to vote 'Out to Pass' on LD 2124.

Respectfully,

Andrew Couture

Sue Gayne

Deborah Stewart PMHNP

Betty St. Hilaire NHRTC, CHW

Garrett Fontaine MD

References

1. Community Housing of Maine. *FUSE Initiative*. <https://www.chomhousing.org/our-impact>. Accessed February 6, 2026.