

Melissa McEntee
Rumford
LD 2124

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, esteemed members of the Committee on Housing and Urban Development, my name is Melissa McEntee, Executive Director of Rumford Group Homes and I am writing this in strong support of LD 2124.

We operate the only emergency family shelters in Oxford County. For the approximately 22 families we're able to serve, our 56 emergency shelter beds mean the difference between safety, warmth and support and the cold, danger and hopelessness of sleeping on the streets or, if they're lucky, a car. And yet, we do so on the perpetual edge of closure.

Last year, following years of significant underfunding, Maine lawmakers threw us a lifeline. LD 698 provided about \$5 million in one-time emergency funding to Maine's 40 qualifying shelters - temporarily increasing MaineHousing's Shelter Operating Subsidy from approximately \$7 to approximately \$18/bed per night of the estimated \$102 it costs to provide the bed and associated services.

And we are deeply grateful - it kept our doors open. But that lifeline is frayed. York County's only adult shelter closed in May 2025. Others in Aroostook, Hancock and Oxford counties teeter on the brink. The truth is stark: without sustained, reliable funding, Maine's emergency shelter network will collapse and shelters like ours will close.

This is not abstract. When shelters close, families lose more than a bed. They lose their schools, doctors, jobs and the fragile support systems that hold their lives together. For parents already in crisis, uprooting them from their communities is devastating - and costly. It drives families into hospitals, jails and emergency systems that strain taxpayers far more than shelter ever would.

At Rumford Group Homes, we offer more than warmth and safety. We help families rebuild. We provide meals, showers and laundry — but that's just the beginning. Our staff spend hours each week helping parents navigate MaineCare, secure food, find transportation and prepare for housing. We connect people to jobs, educational programs and parenting classes. We partner with schools and child protective services. We stay with families even after they leave because our goal isn't shelter, it's stability.

We see transformations every day. A grandmother and her teenage grandson currently staying with us who spent months sleeping in their car have a safe place to breathe and focus on school while we get them transitioned into permanent housing. Parents who walk in exhausted and hopeless slowly regain confidence. Children feel safe for the first time in years. These are not numbers — they are Maine families, and they are depending on us.

But we cannot do this alone. Costs continue to rise, affordable housing remains scarce and federal resources for other essentials of living shrink or are eliminated altogether. As a result, Maine families are more reliant than ever on our statewide shelter network and supports. And we are hanging on - running unsustainable deficits because we know what happens if we close. For Oxford County families, losing our three shelters would mean zero family beds.

You as lawmakers have a chance to do what is both morally right and fiscally wise: provide a predictable, ongoing funding stream shelters can count on.

Emergency shelters are essential infrastructure - like hospitals and fire stations. We respond to crisis, meet basic human needs and help people rebuild. Thousands of Mainers are depending on us.