



Rachel Talbot Ross
Senator, District 28

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House
Station Augusta,
Maine 04333

**Testimony of Sen. Rachel Talbot Ross
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 Honorable Colleagues on the Housing and Economic Development Committee. I am Senator Rachel Talbot Ross and represent Senate District 28 which is part of Portland, part of the Casco Bay Islands and includes the University of Southern Maine Campus. I am here today to testify in support of LD 2124, “An Act to Support Emergency Shelter Funding Using Revenue from the Real Estate Transfer Tax.”

Last session, I was honored to sponsor LD 698, “An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine” in response to a burgeoning crisis in our statewide emergency shelter system. That crisis was not abstract—it was happening in real time in communities across the state, including in my home community of Portland. Shelters were operating on credit, delaying payroll and facing imminent closure. And we in fact saw the closure of York County Shelter in 2025.

Fortunately, LD 698 was passed by this Committee, enacted and funded by the legislature and signed by the Governor. And it worked as a stop gap measure – keeping doors open, stabilizing providers and protecting the dignity and safety of thousands of Mainers for one more year. But it was not a solution. LD 2124 seeks a similar goal - providing a modest, ongoing increase in funding for shelter operations that, together with other funding sources and recent policy initiatives will bring us closer to resolving this annual shelter funding crisis.

LD 2124 acknowledges that emergency shelters are not optional or peripheral services - they are core public infrastructure that warrants real investment —especially for older adults, people with disabilities, people exiting incarceration or foster care and individuals with complex physical and mental health needs. When shelters are unstable, the harm falls most heavily on those who already face the greatest barriers.

And the underlying fiscal challenges faced by Maine shelters have not changed since I came before you last year. If anything, it has worsened – with the gap between the estimated cost of roughly \$102 per night to operate a shelter bed even wider when compared to the State’s static baseline operating subsidy of just \$7.16 per bed night. And because LD 698’s increase of that rate to approximately \$19 was temporary, shelter providers are now once again facing uncertainty, debt and the real prospect of closure.

LD 2124 would make a portion of that increase permanent, funding it through a dedicated share of the real estate transfer tax—a revenue source that grows with the economy rather than shrinking over time. Stable funding allows shelters to retain staff, plan responsibly and focus on helping people move forward rather than scrambling to survive.



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This is also a matter of fiscal responsibility. Research consistently shows that access to shelter reduces emergency room use, interactions with law enforcement and mortality. It's simple, when shelters close, people do not disappear—they end up in encampments, hospitals and jails, at far greater cost to municipalities and taxpayers. If Maine's emergency shelters are forced to reduce services due to lack of funding, more individuals and families across our state with nowhere to turn will face tragic and costly outcomes.

And to be clear, shelter funding is not a substitute for housing development or the services that help keep vulnerable Mainers stable once housed. Maine must continue to invest in these strategies. But in the meantime, our shelter system is stretched beyond capacity. With more people needing shelter than available beds—and longer stays because there is nowhere else to go—we cannot afford to lose a single bed.

Emergency shelters are the bridge between crisis and stability – but that bridge is crumbling. LD 698 showed what was possible when the Legislature acted with urgency, fiscal wisdom and compassion. LD 2124 honors that work by turning emergency action into sustainable policy.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support LD 2124. Thank you.

Senator Rachel Talbot Ross
Senate District 28

Part of Portland, Part of the Casco Bay Islands and the University of Southern Maine Campus

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