

Brian Townsend  
Commonspace  
LD 2124

Honorable members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee,  
I am writing in support of LD 2124: An Act to Support Emergency Shelter Funding Using Revenue from the Real Estate Transfer Tax.

As the Executive Director of Commonspace, an agency that supports adults with challenges related to substance use, behavioral health, poverty, and housing insecurity, I can tell you that we witness the urgent value of available shelter beds in the communities we serve on a nightly basis. Commonspace has also run temporary emergency shelters, and we are keenly aware of the challenges involved in sustainably maintaining these vitally important community resources.

The short-term fix provided through LD 698 prevented the closure of shelters, but it was very clearly not a long-term solution.

As with any non-profit providing critical community resources, shelter operators need predictable, ongoing funding in order to keep their doors open and run spaces that meet their goals and neighborhood standards. With the York County shelter already closed and statements from Rumford Area Group Homes that their shelter is at risk of closing, there is clear and current evidence of what the result will be if sustainable funding solutions are not realized: more closed shelters, fewer shelter beds in fewer locations, and no answers for individuals seeking emergency shelter. When a shelter closes or reduces its resources we see an increase in human suffering as well as greater pressure on police, emergency systems, and hospitals, as well as on the nearest shelter that is still managing to operate, with the additional burden this imposes.

We know from our shelter-operating partners that Maine's shelter operations reimbursement rate remains \$7.16 per bed night, while MaineHousing estimates that the average cost of providing safe shelter and services is \$102 per night. LD 698 provided a modest, temporary increase to \$19 per night, which briefly kept many shelters afloat.

LD 2124 would make a similar increase in operational funding permanent by using a stable, predictable revenue source that grows with inflation: the real estate transfer tax.

With this, shelters will be able to plan responsibly when they know what resources they can count on.

Commonspace has seen that when the communities we serve have insufficient sheltering options, more of our program participants end up outside. Unsheltered homelessness comes with horrific outcomes for the individual, and also negatively impacts communities through increased instances of emergency room use, crime, and litter and other public health concerns. Emergency shelters are needed, and save lives, but they are also cost-saving mechanisms for our communities and our state.

Please pass LD 2124, allowing our shelter system to stabilize so that they can continue to do well at their essential tasks: providing temporary, emergency shelter and serving as links to permanent housing for individuals across Maine's communities.

Sincerely,  
Brian Townsend  
Executive Director, Commonspace