

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and all honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Hanna Falkie, I live in Orono, and I work for the Shaw House, and I'm here today to testify in favor of LD 1076: An Act to Support the Operations of Youth Shelters in Maine.

My name is Hanna Falkie and I am the Outreach Coordinator for the Shaw House Youth Homeless Shelter. I've worked with the Shaw House since 2018, beginning as a university intern and working into the Outreach program I now supervise. As an Outreach member, I have worked providing outreach and case management with homeless youth, and more extensively, homeless youth that are unsheltered and often living outside. The youth we serve are exceptionally high risk, frequently with lifelong unaddressed mental, social, and developmental needs and, always, without a sense of permanency. An emergency shelter is a triage for the larger social challenges attached to homelessness, and in turn the Shaw House navigates through these factors by offering extensive case management and programming designed to holistically address client needs on an individual level.

In regards to Extending the 30-day stay limitation: youth that are homeless universally have several, interlocking factors contributing to their homelessness and even more so, extensive barriers to transitioning out of homelessness. Children are often dropped off at our doorstep by their own parents, or by community members and service providers that are strangers to them. With nothing more but the clothes on their back they are currently expected to participate in assessment, intensive case management, goal and life skills development, regimented shelter daily life, and exit planning. Whether the exit plan is to have them housed or to be reunified with family, time restraints create urgency when so many different needs are to be addressed or treated. Interventions such as family/conflict mediation, clinical therapy treatment, and crisis management do not happen at a universal pace; and without time to plan and provide services we often see youth experiences a relapse back into homelessness---and back on our doorstep, alone. Often times, we do not see returns such as adequate progress in family mediation, acquisition of MaineCare or other subsidies, or progress towards goals pertaining to begin able to maintain in a home environment. There have been 16 year olds in and out of our shelter with substance use and mental health issues, where relying on 30 days to create a stable and feasible plan *and actualize* it in sight of returning home has not been enough; kids returning to our doorstep with a sense of failure with each relapse. LD 1076 benefits the quality of services that can be provided for youth, offering larger windows of time for youth to address the factors contributing to their homelessness, and be in a structured environment where they can develop the skills to live independent lives with family or other stable, natural supports. With more time to build rapport and address these needs quality of care and chance of return to homelessness could decrease.

In regards to allocation of funds: It is common knowledge that most shelters operate with limited funding, parsed out to be used for several different operational expenses; we have a workforce who need wages competitive with agency averages, facility costs, food costs, healthcare expenses... With Federal, State, and Private Funding, even pennies are counted to keep programs operating. The cost of maintaining baseline and essential programming and services sometimes comes at the expense of providing more encompassing resources that could reinforce a youth's ability to successfully transition. Youth who are housed have no cars or license; they are dependent on limited resources from us our Penquis for even their most basic needs of transporting their groceries back to their apartments, or attending their counseling appointments. There are things those without the lived experience of homelessness may not realize are debilitating barriers; such as having a phone connected with a cell

plan to attend their telemed appoints, or even follow up with referrals for their identified services when they exit the shelter. Expanded funding could be having more extensive training in conflict resolution, mediation, and therapeutic techniques for staff, allowing more informed and effective provision of services while within the shelter and out. LD 1076 serves to allow us to reach those things out of sight—to have more breathing room for developing comprehensive programs and enriching staff with most current practices outside of the bare essentials. Effectiveness of program would increase, and the ability to provide more encompassing outcomes and exit plans for youth would too.

Allowing more time and funding for Youth Shelters in the state would effectively increase the quality of rapport that can be built with youth and their support systems, allowing chronically homeless youth to have the time they need to build the bridges they need to support their transition into housing. New youth would have the ability to have a wider array of services planned in their time, and through that, have more say in the services they receive. Increased funding can lead to wider in-house services and practice, circumnavigating barriers such as client wait-lists, paperwork processing for MaineCare, social security services, and other needed subsidies. For these reasons, I speak in support to LD 1076 An Act to Support the Operations of Youth Shelters in Maine.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration going forward with this bill. Please contact me with any questions you may have. I can be reached at 207-944-4004 , or hannafaulkie@shawhouse.us.

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