

Testimony of Doug Dunbar from Hermon, Maine

In Support of LD 2136

An Act to Provide Financial Support for Shelters for Unhoused Individuals

And

In Support of LD 2138

Resolve, to Improve Funding for Homeless Shelters

January 26, 2024

There is nearly **\$1 billion** in the state's Rainy Day account. With that in mind, are we actually debating whether to provide a modest amount of additional funding to help maintain—*not expand*—temporary shelter for individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Maine?

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, my name is Doug Dunbar. This testimony is offered in the strongest possible support of LDs 2136 and 2138, with recognition that we have all failed.

It is inexcusable and our collective fault that we have a record number of people struggling to survive without housing. We have failed to anticipate; failed to plan; failed to appropriate. Let me ask a simple question. How much rain has to fall and who must get drenched before we turn to the Rainy Day fund?

Here's the current reality. It constantly rains and pours on individuals & families experiencing homelessness until they drown—without any consideration on our part of using a modest portion of money in the Rainy Day account. We simply don't care about these people. We all say we care, of course. Ultimately, however, we don't care nearly enough.

Here's another thought. When a fire, flood, hurricane or other natural disaster strikes, we mobilize and race to assist our neighbors in need. We call out the National Guard. We activate MEMA and call on FEMA. **We find the money to shelter people and rebuild.**

Not so when the disaster results from domestic violence, unexpected medical bills, a sudden drastic increase in rent, chronic mental illness, a substance use disorder, or one of the other factors contributing to homelessness. When these neighbors of ours face a disaster, few people come to the rescue and government is reluctant to take the necessary action.

As you know well, we need an enormous investment in permanent housing. And we need to better address the causes of homelessness. But we should be ashamed if we don't step up and ensure temporary shelter and services to those who are currently locked out of permanent housing. Many of these individuals are ill. Most are deeply impoverished. All deserve better from us.

We have all failed. All levels of government have failed. Don't add to that mountain of failure by rejecting these bills. Please, on behalf of all those suffering to survive, I ask you to support LDs 2136 and 2138. Demonstrate your care and concern.