



**PORTLAND**  
Regional Chamber of Commerce

93 Exchange Street Portland, ME 04101 • (207) 772-2811

[chamber@portlandregion.com](mailto:chamber@portlandregion.com) • [PortlandRegion.com](http://PortlandRegion.com)

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**Testimony in Support of LD 2136-An Act to Provide Financial Support for Shelters for Unhoused Individuals & LD 2138-Resolve, to Improve Funding for Homeless Shelters**

Joint Select Committee on Housing  
January 23, 2024

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and members of the Committee on Housing,

I am Eamonn Dundon, the Director of Advocacy of the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce. We represent 1,300 businesses in our region who employ over 65,000 Mainers. We are submitting this written testimony today to express our organization's strongest support for both LD 2136 and LD 2138. We value the approaches both pieces of legislation take to bolstering our low-barrier shelters, with a slight preference towards LD 2138, which would provide more certainty as to the distribution of funds, allowing low-barrier shelters to plan and sustain themselves into the future with strong foundational funding.

Regardless of the approach the committee may take to bolster the finances of low-barrier shelters, the need is enormous and directly impacts many communities in our state who are dealing with the fallout from chaotic unsheltered homelessness. Leaving people outside who do not have a place to go has significant impact on the residents, businesses, and visitors in the vicinity, in addition to the unhoused individuals who have suffered immense pain and suffering due to a lack of adequate shelter facilities. In Portland, we have withstood measurable increases in theft, assault, rape, drug trafficking, sex trafficking, communicable diseases, and fires because of unsheltered homelessness. This has resulted in neighborhoods devastated by these impacts that destroy the social fabric of our community.

This story is one that is becoming all too common across our state, with notable increases in homeless encampments in all corners of the state including Sanford, Biddeford, Portland, Lewiston, Bangor, Ellsworth, and Presque Isle. The only solution to this is low-barrier shelters, which are proven to lead to better outcomes for the unhoused who find themselves in an emergency. If a lack of shelter capacity exists, it will continue to be an excuse for the proliferation of homeless encampments and that should not be an acceptable solution for any of the impacted communities, including residents, area businesses and indeed the unhoused.

Typically, we are in the business of defending free markets, but we are not above calling for government intervention in areas in which market solutions will not yield favorable outcomes for our community. For instance, we have been consistent advocates for increased state investment in childcare, because the economics of providing that service do not support a functioning market for families or providers. As many of the service providers will likely testify in the public hearing, homeless shelters are another area in which collective support in the form of state appropriation is necessary to avoid larger costs to our state's economy. The current shelter financing system, if left unattended, will result in more low-barrier shelters closing, putting people on the street and leading to the establish of unmanaged encampments. These encampments are incredibly difficult to resolve, and while they continue, they extract great economic and security costs to the neighborhoods that host them.

Please support the intent of these two bills and ensure that no Mainer every has to set up and tent because they have nowhere else to go. We thank you for your time and commitment to all Mainers, and we ask for your expeditious approval of funding for Maine's low-barrier shelters.