



Office of the  
Mayor

January 23, 2024

Dear Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for LD 2136 and LD 2138 based on the information provided. These bills address the critical issue of homelessness in Maine and present an opportunity for positive change.

LD 2136 provides ongoing funds for homeless shelters, allocating \$10 million beginning next fiscal year. This is a crucial step in addressing the crisis mode that emergency shelters have been operating in for years. By providing sufficient resources to these shelters, we can ensure that they can function optimally and meet the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. This is especially important in light of the challenges posed by the pandemic, which has worsened the situation.

On the other hand, LD 2138 aims to increase the overnight bed rate of reimbursement for low-barrier shelters to \$90 per night. This is necessary because low-barrier shelters, which provide a primary entry point to the healthcare system and recovery community for unsheltered community members, face significant operational challenges. The higher operating costs of low-barrier shelters, including staffing requirements and intensive aftercare, require increased reimbursement rates. Additionally, LD 2138 seeks to access Medicaid funds to serve unhoused individuals with substance use disorder or mental health disorders, elderly persons with medical needs, and persons with disabilities with medical needs.

The importance of low-barrier shelters cannot be overstated. They serve as a crucial lifeline for unsheltered community members who have little to no access to social, behavioral, and medical service providers. By removing barriers such as criminal background checks, credit checks, and sobriety requirements, low-barrier shelters provide a safe and inclusive space for individuals in need. However, these shelters face funding challenges due to the lack of targeted funding streams specific to their clients. By creating a separate funding line item for low-barrier shelters, we can address this issue and ensure the continuity of their essential services.

Failure to support LD 2136 and LD 2138 could have severe consequences, including increased encampments and unsheltered homelessness, particularly for those experiencing mental health or substance use disorders. It is crucial to prioritize the funding for low-barrier shelters to prevent further crises and provide stability for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.

In conclusion, I urge you to vote in favor of LD 2136 and LD 2138 with the amended language allowing for a separate funding line item for low-barrier shelters. These bills are essential in addressing the crisis in Maine's homeless shelter system and ensuring that individuals experiencing homelessness receive the support they need. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Michael Morris  
Mayor of Waterville