



MILESTONE
RECOVERY

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing: my name is Oliver Bradeen, I am the executive director of Milestone Recovery in Portland, Maine and a resident of Falmouth and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 211: An Act To Support Emergency Shelter Access for Persons Experiencing Homelessness.

Milestone Recovery is a social non-profit that operates many substance use disorder related programs and services. One of our core programs in Portland is our 41 bed, low barrier emergency homeless shelter for men with Substance Use Disorder. Milestone's Shelter is an integral part of the continuum of care for Maine. Unfortunately, as a result of their use, many individuals with substance use disorder end up experiencing homelessness. Homeless shelters like Milestone Recovery's shelter, have become an integral part of the continuum of care for mental health and substance use disorders in this state. There are many approaches to supporting Mainers experiencing housing instability, substance use disorders and mental health disorders, but emergency shelter is a key part of this solution.

Emergency low barrier shelters are a core part of supporting our communities. They are more than a warm space, hot meal and a cot to sleep on for the night. Our emergency shelter systems work to connect clients to community resources, such as mental health and substance use treatment, housing, primary care and case management services. Our shelter is a pathway out of homelessness. We engage with our clients in a way that validates and respects them for who they are: a human deserving of kindness. Through our engagement with our clients, skilled shelter attendants, case management and community partners we are able to work towards solutions for our clients.

As stated before, our shelter is often the first step in changing our clients' lives. Milestone Recovery also runs Southern Maine's only stand alone non-profit medical detox. It is located above our emergency shelter. When our clients stay with us, they have the opportunity to engage with our staff and work on entering our detox to begin their recovery. The ability to stay at our shelter and enter detox is a core support function of the substance use continuum of care in our state.

Shelter programs in Maine have been struggling financially for years. Maine Housing helps significantly but Milestone's shelter, like all shelters in the state continues to struggle financially. We are doing more with flat or in some cases reduced funding. For example, the mats used for shelter start at 3 inches thick, but quickly become compressed from daily use. The current funding models do not support the ability to replace these mats regularly forcing clients to sleep uncomfortable cots and in some cases thin mats on the floor.

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HOME TEAM**
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Working as a shelter attendant is a challenging job. Shelter duties involve helping to shower a client, cleaning up vomit, feces or urine, or assisting a client in dressing a wound. It also involves a skill of deescalating clients who are intoxicated, may be experiencing mental health symptoms. On top of all of these issues, our clients are often experiencing health issues related to years of chronic substance use. Shelter attendants are also experiencing and exposed to both direct and indirect trauma. None of our staff are doing this work to get rich. However, without some increased funding, it is a challenge for us to even stay competitive with wages without sacrificing client services.

Milestone Recovery would like to do more for our clients and our staff. Staffing shelters continues to be a struggle. Funding and staffing were a challenge before the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has only exacerbated and highlighted the challenges of running emergency shelter in Maine. At the time of this hearing, Milestone Recovery, as well as the Oxford Street Shelter are both experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak. Milestone Recovery has had 8 staff and 16 clients contract COVID-19 over the past few weeks. We have and do follow all of the CDC guidelines, but congregate living such as shelters provide a high risk of exposure and transmission of COVID-19. This risk makes staffing our facility an added challenge and maintaining safety for clients and staff is a top priority. The cost of PPE, cleaning supplies and COVID-19 precautions adds to the weight of our already underfunded shelter program. LD 211: An Act To Support Emergency Shelter Access for Persons Experiencing Homelessness garnered bipartisan support in the last legislative session, and it is my hope that it does so again. This bill would help to ensure an integral system of care is maintained for Mainers.

Respectfully,

Oliver Bradeen, LCPC

Executive Director

Milestone Recovery

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