

Emergency Shelter Assessment Committee

February 16, 2021

Re: LD 211 An Act To Support Emergency Shelter Access for Persons Experiencing Homelessness in Maine

Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, I am testifying today on behalf of the Emergency Shelter Assessment Committee (ESAC) in support of LD 211, An Act To Support Emergency Shelter Access for Persons Experiencing Homelessness in Maine. ESAC is a collaborative of homeless service providers, funders, advocates and people with lived experience working to ensure the safety and well-being of people who are homeless in Portland. Through planning, coordination, and advocacy, we promote a continuum of care and support for individuals experiencing homelessness. The United Way and City of Portland initiated this group in 1987 to act primarily in an advisory capacity.

LD 211 would provide ongoing General Fund appropriations in the amount of \$3,000,000 per year to the Shelter Operating Subsidy program within the Maine State Housing Authority to support operations and capacity at low-barrier emergency homeless shelters across the State. This bill specifies that the funding is supplemental to the Maine State Housing Authority's Emergency Shelter and Housing Assistance Program (ESHAP) and is to be delivered outside of the funding formula set forth in the Homeless Solutions Rule.

Throughout State Fiscal Year 2019 (ending 6/30/2019), 5,886 people experienced homelessness in Maine. Of this group, 102 people were Long Term Stayers (LTS), or people who have experienced 180 days or more of homelessness in that twelve-month time period (83 of whom were single adults, and 19 of whom were members of families). Though we have made significant progress housing the longest stayers in homelessness – our Long Term Stayers – emergency shelters across Maine continue to be full or overflowing.

Emergency shelters depend upon a variety of funding systems, some of which are unpredictable, and all of which do not meet shelters' financial needs, especially as the numbers of people sleeping outside has continued to climb. Other states across the country have experienced precipitous increases in people experiencing unsheltered homelessness; it's important that Maine have the capacity to address this vulnerable group of people before it faces a similar crisis. In order to accomplish this, it's important that we continue to have a robust shelter system, and doing so necessitates additional emergency shelter operating funding, which LD 1909 would provide.

I would specifically ask that you please ensure that funding for the Shelter Operating Subsidy program does not come from the Housing Opportunities for Maine (HOME) Fund and remains as a General Fund budget item.

Please support LD 211 so that we can ensure emergency shelters across Maine can continue to provide critical services to people experiencing homelessness so we can all work together to end and prevent homelessness in Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.