

Molly Feeney
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Good afternoon Senator Rafferty and Representative Sylvester, and members of the joint standing committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Molly Feeney and I am the Director of Social Services at Knox County Homeless Coalition (KCHC), and a resident of Morrill, Maine. I am here today to testify in support of LD 211 –

It was just over a year ago today that a local family handed over \$14,000 to a private seller- \$14,000 that took months and months to save. This family purchased what they had hoped to be their own affordable housing solution. Within weeks of living in a used trailer the family of four were growing ill. They found that the entire home was infested with black mold, the purchase was a total loss. This family reached out to our agency for shelter and support. Mom took on the role of her children's educator due to COVID 19, Dad continued to work within his essential, yet minimum wage job. This family has tended to debt responsibilities, while continuously applying for higher paid positions, and submitting every housing application they could get their hands on. This is just one of so many stories- but a glaring reminder of how, even with the best intentions and tireless effort, homelessness is too close for comfort for far too many.

Individuals and families reach out to homeless shelters to ask for support in finding a safe place to sleep but more significantly a stable place to live. However, accomplishing a sustainable living option means tackling the obstacles that stand between these individuals and families, first.

For some this means seeking rehabilitation for drug use, for others it means setting up debt payment plans with CMP, it means coming to terms with past evictions and learning how to advocate for a readiness to rent once again. It might mean finding a safe place to flee with your children at the risk of abandoning all natural supports and material goods. It is deciding between an extra night in a motel or replacing the brake pads in your 1990 Windstar because that's the only means to maintain employment. It's figuring out ways to meet basic needs while living out of a vehicle on 0 degree nights, in the middle of a pandemic, when Wal-Mart can no longer serve as a warming center due to the risk on public health.

Shelter is more than a safe place to sleep, it is THE most critical variable in effective care, and a necessary component in achieving sustainable housing. When individuals and families know where they will rest their heads at night it creates space to problem solve. So, if we are talking cost, let's talk about way to break these cycles, let's talk long term fixes, and amplify our shelter programming so that years from now we are scaling back beds due to fewer people experiencing homelessness. To those of who waffle a bit on the expense, I challenge you to consider the math within the larger scope of care, realizing that shelter access is also a direct pathway to barrier removal and sustainable outcomes- so please consider the notion that we cannot afford NOT to support this legislation.