



# THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN MAINE

Loring House

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is John Hennessy and I am the Advocacy and Ministry Network Director for the **Episcopal Diocese of Maine**. I also serve as the co-chair of the **Maine Council of Churches Public Policy Committee**.

**I am testifying on behalf of the Maine Episcopal Public Policy Network and the Maine Council of Churches in support of LD 211.** This bill provides crucial additional funding support for shelter operations across the state of Maine.

The Diocese and the Council have adopted a moral agenda which calls for the elimination of hunger and poverty, and enactment of policies benefiting the most vulnerable.

In his very first sermon, Jesus stood and read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free." Recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of every human being, and acknowledging that there are systems and root causes that lead people to experience the oppression of poverty and food insecurity, we reject any characterization of those who live in poverty as morally deficient.

We call our legislators to join us in holding fast to the vision of a society that ensures that every child of God has equal access to the basics: clean water and air; nutritious and affordable food; safe, adequate, and affordable shelter; heat in the winter; sufficient clothing; emergency and routine health care; and other necessities.

In [January of 2019](#), there were approximately 2,106 homeless on a given night in Maine and we know these figures have risen in 2020. These are families, veterans, unaccompanied young adults, and the chronically homeless. According to the [National Coalition for the Homeless](#), the lack of affordable housing and limited programs that assist with housing has contributed to the current homelessness crisis.

Homelessness in Maine is a complex issue and requires multi-faceted community solutions to bring about change for those affected.

The current pandemic has highlighted the need for stable housing and strong shelters as a part Maine's public health system. Throughout the past year, Maine's longstanding shortage of

affordable housing, rental assistance, case management and legal services have combined with the Covid-19 pandemic to create a dire housing crisis in the state.

Hundreds of households have fallen into homelessness and thousands of Mainers have fallen behind on rent and are at risk of homelessness. This crisis has highlighted how a strong housing system is central to a strong public health response.

When our housing stability programs don't work and Maine families become homeless, shelters are the crucial emergency resource in our housing system that assist Maine families in achieving basic safety and security and taking the first steps back to permanent, stable housing and economic security. We support this bill, as a crucial piece in an effort to strengthen Maine's housing system for the long economic recovery from Covid-19.


Strong Shelters are also vital to achieving racial equity. On any given night, 26% of Maine's homeless population are Black or African American even though they make up only 1% of Maine's population. Adequate funding for safe, accessible shelter facilities as the first step to housing is a basic step in promoting racial equity within our entire housing system.

As Maine looks to strengthen its housing system and provide the continuum of solutions needed to help all Mainers achieve housing stability, shelters are a crucial part.

In closing, I share the words from Matthew 25 when the Lord said, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."

For these reasons and more, we support LD 211.

Respectfully submitted,



John J. Hennessy