

David Plimpton
Cape Elizabeth

Dear Legislators,

I am writing in support of LD 211 regarding providing emergency shelter access.

LD 211 would provide additional funding to support operations and capacity at emergency shelters throughout Maine, to supplement and support Maine State Housing Authority's emergency shelter and housing assistance program (ESHAP), and would be flexible and responsive to the increasing need facing many shelters across the state.

The shortage of affordable housing, lack of mental health and substance use disorder services has become even more acute during the COVID-19 pandemic, creating a crisis in Maine, forcing more people experiencing homelessness to go unsheltered, in sometimes life-threatening temperatures, without a safe place to stay.

All of this exacerbates already existential problems facing our homeless population, including health and life expectancy.

Unsheltered people, especially women, report experiencing higher rates of violence and trauma

Unsheltered people experience substantially longer durations of homelessness than their sheltered

Unsheltered people use emergency services at a much higher rate than their sheltered counterparts

Emergency shelters meet basic needs that are critical for keeping people alive.

Clients at emergency shelters work with professional staff to address barriers to housing. This results in clients moving into housing sooner, significantly improving their lives while decreasing financial burdens on emergency services, shelters, and jails.

Opioid epidemic: As the substance use epidemic continues, the role of emergency shelters has become more complex, requiring increased time and staffing to properly assist people.

While the cost of running a shelter has increased — partially due to higher wages for the emotional intensive work that requires a highly skilled workforce — most shelters have not seen an increase in funding.

COVID-19: The pandemic has caused unforeseen staffing, health, safety, and budgetary challenges for shelters. Now more than ever, these shelters need additional funding to support clients and keep staff safe.

Racial equity: Communities of color disproportionately experience poverty, homelessness, and the effects of COVID-19. In fact, 26% of Maine's homeless population is Black or African American despite making up only 1% of Maine's general population. Thus, unsheltered homelessness is a racial justice issue.

I have been involved with Preble Street in Portland since 1987 as a Board member, officer, fundraiser, donor and volunteer, so I can attest to the critical work it does on all of these issues.

Thank you for your consideration and efforts.

Sincerely,