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Mid-Maine
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MID-MAINE HOMELESS SHELTER & SERVICES

KATIE SPENCER WHITE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
(207) 872-8082 ♦ (207) 872-6550 ♦ FAX: (207) 872-0834
shelter@ShelterMe.org ♦ www.shelterme.org

To: Labor and Housing Committee
From: Katie Spencer White, Executive Director
Re: LD 211
Date: February 17, 2021

Good Morning Chairman Rafferty and Committee Members,

I am Katie Spencer White, a resident of Brunswick and executive director of Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter & Services in Waterville. I come to you today to ask that you support LD211. This funding will support emergency shelters to ensure that we continue to provide essential emergency shelter for people in crisis.

Last year I testified in support of LD1909. I spoke of the work we do, how critical it is, and then the pandemic hit and everything changed.

The first few months of the pandemic were indescribable. We made it up as we went along and trusted that we could meet whatever challenges came our way.

And we were right. Despite having fewer staff we now serve 33% more people than we did pre-pandemic.

Not only that, where other services dropped off, we stepped in. We've supplied food to people placed in hotels by General Assistance which is an increase of 25% above what we would prepare for our own guests. And when our local food pantry closed its doors due to the pandemic, we expanded our food pantry services.

I am extremely proud of our team and what we have achieved together. But private nonprofit shelters cannot compete with what state agencies provide to their workforce. Our shelter is a small business with less than 30 employees. Our pay, vacation time, and other benefits are uncompetitive. And in a crisis, being mission driven will only take you so far. Staff need to know they can pay their bills and take time off to care for their kids or recharge their overused batteries.

MMHSS Snapshot

- 500 Guests served annually
- Operates 24 hours / 365 days
- Most successful shelter in state for positive discharge from shelter (85% success rate)
- 64% of budget from private donations.
- Currently exceeding usual capacity by 33% without additional investment in infrastructure
- Need to improve pay & benefits to keep good staff
- On-going staff training & development is a critical need.

"Providing Emergency Food & Shelter to Homeless and Displaced Persons in central Maine"
"Founded by the Interfaith Council in 1990"

This year we learned that you can't respond to an emergency unless you have a strong team. Our workforce is our most important asset and with the passage of LD211 the first thing we would do is invest in them. We would offer better terms and conditions and training in the core skills required for crisis work.

Importantly, we would invest in leadership. By necessity we have a flat leadership structure which limits the range of projects we can take on. Case in point: we run a FEMA hotel in Waterville and were offered the opportunity to run one in Augusta. We had to pass on Augusta because we don't have enough staff or the mid-level leadership necessary to make it successful.

We also demonstrated that we are essential to meeting the needs of vulnerable Mainers. General Assistance has been crushed by the weight of this need and many municipalities far exceeded their allocations by tens of thousands of dollars. Hundreds more vulnerable folks don't qualify for GA. Without the network of nonprofit shelters across the state, these Mainers would be left out in the cold. We make sure they are safe from harm and we need a well-trained workforce to carry out this work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, rain, snow or sunshine.

I would love to say we're close to ending homelessness. Sadly, far too many Mainers are in crisis for that to be realistic. But there is hope. This funding will go a long way to ensuring high quality emergency housing with compassionate and skilled staff is available to every vulnerable Mainer as soon as they need it.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Katie Spencer White', with a stylized, cursive script.

Katie Spencer White

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