

Senator Rafferty and Representative Sylvester and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Shawn Yardley and I am the CEO of Community Concepts in Lewiston and testify today in favor of LD211.

I previously served as Director of the City of Bangor's Health and Human Service Department, where I administered separate shelters for men and women and served on the original Statewide Homeless Council for 10 years. In late March, 2020, the City of Lewiston, Maine Housing and DHHS asked CCI if we would establish a time-limited 60 bed wellness shelter to house homeless with the goal of reducing the potential spread of the Covid-19 virus. We operated that shelter through mid-July serving nearly 140 individuals with only 1 Covid positive case. That same July, we were asked to operate a shelter for Covid positive individuals which we continue to operate serving 67 since opening. In November of last year, we once again were asked and agreed to open a 28 -bed wellness shelter which we will operate through the end of April having served 49 individuals since November 15th.

Community Concepts' work over the last 10 months has clearly demonstrated the need for a publicly-funded shelter in Lewiston. We have operated at full capacity for most of the time, frequently having to turn away people who are homeless due to lack of beds. We have successfully connected people, previously homeless, with housing vouchers leading to more stable housing and have demonstrated the benefits of a wellness shelter in our community, including better outcomes with planned discharges from the shelter, reduced costs to the community for emergency services including law enforcement, hospitalizations, emergency medical costs and emergency motels that provide shelter without essential services.

Last summer a guest at the shelter went to a Lewiston City Council meeting and shared the following during the public comment portion of the meeting:

While staying at the Lewiston Wellness Shelter, I started work at Hannaford. The shelter staff fully supported my recovery and today I am 33 days clean. I attend NA every evening and I am in treatment and have 3 sessions a week with my recovery team. I have even been blessed with a housing voucher through the BRAP program. My recovery, simply put, and without exaggeration would not be possible without the Lewiston Wellness Shelter and the great City of Lewiston. The Lewiston Wellness Shelter has provided me a safe, clean and above all else, a friendly place to recover and begin laying the initial bricks that will become the foundation of my new life. I am, but one of many individuals at the Wellness Shelter who are taking all actions necessary and possible to better themselves.

Currently the Lewiston-Auburn area lacks access to any ongoing emergency shelter funding. This means that:

- those experiencing homelessness in our community lack access to housing resources such as housing vouchers administered by Maine Housing;
- those experiencing homelessness have greater challenges to receiving timely health services including mental health services

Lewiston-Auburn would benefit from the creation of an adult emergency shelter that expanded ESHAP funding could make possible. Thank you for supporting LD 211.

