

Samantha Bullard
Bangor

Hello Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Labor and Housing Committee. My name is Sam Bullard, she/hers pronouns, and I am here as a resident of Bangor, the Co-Program Director of the Peace & Justice Center of Eastern Maine, and a member of the Greater Bangor Housing Coalition. Today I am testifying in support of LD 473 because I believe that providing for our houseless community is an essential duty of our government.

Affordable housing is one of the most basic needs of any person, and when these needs are threatened it is our duty as a community and as moral agents to step up and help. During these unprecedented times it's a challenge to find and keep stable housing, which means people rely on resources like shelters more than ever.

However, many of these resources are currently struggling to meet these needs. In Bangor, there are fewer places to keep warm during the freezing winter days, no public restrooms, and not nearly enough funding to provide the aid we are asking of our councilors. Groups like the Greater Bangor Housing Coalition are doing their best to confront these issues; we provide warm meals, help find housing, and uplift the voices of our houseless members. But without our towns receiving the proper funding they need to help our community, there is only so much we can do. What we need now is our leaders to step up and take meaningful action.

It should also be noted that even where resources may seem available for use, they aren't always accessible to those who need it most. Many shelters aren't safe for our members who are queer, disabled, and/or people of color as they will often face discrimination in these spaces. I have personally met some individuals who have endured so much abuse within shelters that they feel safer facing the elements than the people indoors. Those who use substances are also very quickly rejected from most spaces and are left with few options to get back on their feet again. This only puts people in dangerous and inescapable situations, and we are putting their lives on the line when we allow it to happen. It is for these reasons we ought to put funds towards strengthening and diversifying the options we give when providing shelter to those in need.

In summary, Maine needs to prioritize supporting their houseless community. Our resources are already stretched thin, and we can't solely rely on the efforts of nonprofits and the charity of individuals to fix the issue. We need to build stronger and more inclusive housing resources, and the first step to achieving that is providing your support to these people. Thank you for your time.