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January 30, 2024

Re: LD 2146, An Act to Prohibit Certain Municipalities from Adopting Moratoria on Emergency Shelters

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the State and Local Government Committee, my name is Vickey Merrill, and I am the Advocacy Director for Community Housing of Maine (CHOM). CHOM is the largest supportive housing provider for homeless populations in Maine. I am a Tri-Chair for the Maine Continuum of Care, Co-Chair of the Maine Homeless Policy Committee, and serve on the Maine Continuum of Care Board of Directors.

I am testifying in strong support of LD 2146 An Act to Prohibit Certain Municipalities from Adopting Moratoria on Emergency Shelters.

This bill prohibits municipalities with populations exceeding 30,000 people from adopting moratoria on the establishment of emergency shelters that provide temporary shelter for persons experiencing homelessness.

The best practice strategy across the country is to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time. The best way for that to happen is to make sure people have everything they need and have access to it as easily as possible. Communities throughout Maine have been working to implement a coordinated process through which people experiencing homelessness are best served, working to ensure they have unimpeded access to the resources they need to end their homelessness as quickly and efficiently as possible. Moratoria on shelters runs counter to this statewide effort.

In order for Maine to safely meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness, it's important that we have a robust, adequately funded shelter system. People in Maine experiencing homelessness are best served by a sufficiently funded shelter system instead of ordinances prohibiting emergency shelters.

Moratoria on shelters runs counter to best practices and only work to increase unsheltered homelessness and encampments.

And Maine is already experiencing an unsheltered homelessness/encampment crisis:

- As recently as December, Hubs were reporting more than 900 people sleeping outside throughout Maine – and that is after months of effort to bring people indoors.
- In the 2023 Point in Time (PIT) there were 299 people experiencing unsheltered homelessness throughout all of Maine – the highest unsheltered PIT count Maine has ever had by far. In December 2023, there were 300 people unsheltered in Sanford alone.

Encampments are not good for any city or town. Access to shelter and housing is.

It is extremely challenging to house people when they are outside simply trying to survive. Emergency shelters provide a foundation from which people experiencing homelessness, including people with the most acute mental health needs, substance use disorder, and other vulnerabilities, can launch and become stably housed. Having a shelter system with sufficient capacity allows the focus to shift to having everyone experiencing homelessness inside and housing people and keeping people housed. Shelters are successful in assisting people access housing, especially permanent supportive housing (PSH) for people with the most complex issues underlying their homelessness.

A robust emergency shelter system brings people indoors so that people experiencing homelessness in Maine can be better served in their communities. This is how Maine will end homelessness.



Enacting moratoria on emergency shelters doesn't eliminate the need for shelter, it merely ties the hands of the homeless service system working to end homelessness.

Please pass LD 2146 so we can work to create sound solutions, rooted in best practices, to end and prevent homelessness in Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.