



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

**An Act to Sustain Emergency Homeless Shelters in Maine**

March 24, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jane Field, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches, a nonprofit coalition of seven mainline Protestant member denominations that have more than 400 congregations in Maine with over 50,000 parishioners in their care. Founded in 1938, the Council speaks with a prophetic voice of faith, connecting people within, through, and beyond the church to create a more just, compassionate, and peaceful world. All that we do is grounded in **the central value of love of neighbor** and in the biblical imperative to **protect the vulnerable and hold those who harm them accountable**.

It's because of these core values that the Council **supports passage of LD 698**. The Maine Council of Churches supports this bill because of our long-standing commitment, grounded in Hebrew and Christian scripture, to the economically poor.

Currently, Maine is experiencing a housing crisis, and shelters provide initial emergency care and support, the same way emergency rooms do in our healthcare system. Individuals and families require shelter due to various individual and systemic socio-economic issues, and our churches know that individuals and families will take to the streets or encampments without fiscally viable shelters. MCC's church leaders stood in solidarity with unhoused families and individuals when Portland cleared encampments last year, a heartbreaking situation and one that we do not want to see repeated.

You are aware that the fiscal reality of state funding for emergency shelter operations has not increased since 2016. The appropriation request in LD 698 will raise the state's financial commitment from \$7 per bed, per night to \$19 per bed, per night. It's not a significant increase, yet it could make all the difference to Maine's 41 ESHAP-funded homeless shelters that are already full and struggling to maintain financial viability, especially since Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) are presently frozen, and there are long waiting lists for Permanent Supportive Housing and BRAP, so many people are remaining in emergency shelters longer.

Emergency homeless shelters play a vital role in our communities, especially during a housing crisis. LD 698 would help alleviate some of the operating costs that shelters face, ensuring that they stay in operation. MCC urges you to vote Ought to Pass because we cannot afford to close shelters, have more people in our homeless system, or have people go unsheltered.