

LD 211: An Act To Support Emergency Shelter Access for Persons Experiencing Homelessness

LD 211 would provide additional funding to support operations and capacity at emergency shelters across Maine. The funding would supplement Maine State Housing Authority's emergency shelter and housing assistance program (ESHAP), and would be flexible and responsive to the increasing need facing many shelters across the state.

The shortage of affordable housing, a lack of mental health and substance use disorder services, and the COVID-19 pandemic have created a crisis in Maine, forcing more people experiencing homelessness to go unsheltered, in sometimes life-threatening temperatures, without a safe place to stay.

Costs of unsheltered homelessness

- The life expectancy of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness is 28 years less than their housed counterparts
- The mortality rate for this population is over 3x higher than their sheltered counterparts
- 84% of unsheltered individuals report physical health conditions compared to just 19% of sheltered individuals
- Unsheltered people, especially women, report experiencing higher rates of violence and trauma
- Unsheltered people experience substantially longer durations of homelessness than their sheltered counterparts — an average of 2,632 days, compared to 410 days for sheltered individuals
- Unsheltered people use emergency services at a much higher rate than their sheltered counterparts

Need for emergency shelter funding

Saving lives: Emergency shelters meet basic needs that are critical for keeping people alive.

Connection to permanent housing: Clients at emergency shelters work with professional staff to address barriers to housing. This results in clients moving into housing sooner, significantly improving their lives while decreasing financial burdens on emergency services, shelters, and jails.

Opioid epidemic: As the substance use epidemic continues, the role of emergency shelters has become more complex, requiring increased time and staffing to properly assist people.

Budgetary concerns: While the cost of running a shelter has increased — partially due to higher wages for the emotional intensive work that requires a highly skilled workforce — most shelters have not seen an increase in funding.

COVID-19: The pandemic has caused unforeseen staffing, health, safety, and budgetary challenges for shelters. Now more than ever, these shelters need additional funding to support clients and keep staff safe.

Racial equity: Communities of color disproportionately experience poverty, homelessness, and the effects of COVID-19. In fact, 26% of Maine's homeless population is Black or African American despite making up only 1% of Maine's general population. Unsheltered homelessness is a racial justice issue.