

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, ESQ.

Ought to Pass

**LD 2136 – An Act to Provide Financial Support for Shelters
for Unhoused Individuals**

LD 2138 – Resolve, to Improve Funding for Homeless Shelters

Joint Select Committee on Housing

January 23, 2024

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, greetings. My name is Michael Kebede, and I am Policy Counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, we urge you to support LDs 2136 and 2138.

According to Maine Housing, homelessness in Maine has more than doubled in the past decade, from 1,200 people in 2014 to 4,258 people in 2023.¹ Add to this, the Press Herald reported last month that “Maine’s privately run homeless shelters are facing dire funding challenges and at least one is in danger of closing.”² Experts agree that more is needed from the state.³ An underfunded shelter system can mean increased burdens for jails and prisons, law enforcement agencies, municipalities, and hospitals. Most concerning, underfunded shelters could mean unconstitutional deprivations of civil rights and civil liberties, such as when officials enforce camping bans despite the lack of alternatives to sleeping outside.

LDs 2136 and 2138 would both help mitigate this crisis.

If enacted, LD 2136 would appropriate \$10 million in ongoing funding for homeless shelters. This investment is overdue and urgently necessary. LD 2138

¹ 2023 Point in Time Count, MaineHousing, Maine State Housing Authority, *available at* https://www.mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/housing-reports/2023-point-in-time.pdf?sfvrsn=e1c28015_5

² Rachel Ohm, *Maine homeless shelters warn of financial crisis Six shelters around the state are facing a collective shortfall of about \$4.1 million and at least one is in danger of closing*, Press Herald, Dec. 6, 2023, *available at* <https://www.pressherald.com/2023/12/05/homeless-shelters-in-maine-face-dire-funding-challenges/>

³ *Id.*

would direct the Department of Health and Human Services to increase its overnight bed rate of reimbursement for low-barrier shelters to \$90 per night; direct the Department of Health and Human Services to pursue a waiver from the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to access Medicaid funds to serve unhoused persons with substance use disorder or mental health disorders or who are elderly persons with medical needs or persons with disabilities with medical needs.

We urge you to vote that LDs 2136 and 2138 *ought to pass*.