

NH Coalition to End Homelessness

Representative Kenneth Weyler, Chair
House Finance Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 210-211
33 N State Street
Concord, NH 03301

April 20, 2024

Dear Chairman Weyler and Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee:

On behalf of the NH Coalition to End Homelessness (NHCEH), I am writing in support of SB 406, making an appropriation to the Department of Health and Human Services to increase rates for shelter programs.

It is evident that the issue of homelessness in NH will require significant intervention and investment if we are to successfully reduce the numbers of individuals and families who experience homelessness in the state. According to NHCEH's most recent annual report, *The State of Homelessness in New Hampshire*, published in December 2023, **6031 unique individuals, including 745 children, were documented as experiencing literal homelessness in NH in 2022.** This definition does not count those who were doubled up or couch surfing due to inability to secure their own housing. The rate of overall homelessness in NH increased from 331 per 100,000 residents in 2020 to 432 in 2022, reflecting a rate increase of nearly 31%. **The number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, living on the streets, in their cars, in encampments or in campgrounds, increased over 41% in these same two years, from 1030 in 2020 to 1455 in 2022.**

Last year's Legislative funding increase from \$8/night to \$20/night per bed was an important step towards adequately supporting the most easily accessible tier in the system that serves some of the most vulnerable individuals and families in our state. **However, for many of the state's emergency shelters, the current rate covers less than half of their actual operating costs.** The proposed increase to \$27/night will help organizations sustain their ability to provide emergency shelter and the essential supportive services that are key to helping people access permanent housing solutions during this challenging time of increasing costs.

It is important to note that the funding of emergency shelters is not only about providing individuals and families experiencing homelessness with a warm meal and a safe place to sleep at night. Shelter providers who receive State Grant in Aid (SGIA) funds for emergency and specialty shelter operations are also required to deliver supportive case management services to assist with the identification of and connection to long-term housing solutions. **This is especially difficult work now, at a time where vacancy rates have decreased to less than 1% and rents have increased an average of 40.5%** (with a range of increases from 28%-82% across NH's 10 counties) from 2018-2023,

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according to the NH Housing Finance Authority's *Annual Residential Rental Cost Survey*. Shelter-based case management services help people more rapidly exit emergency shelters, increasing bed availability for outreach workers to refer those living unsheltered, decreasing the staggering number of people living unhoused on the streets and in encampments across the state. **Additional funding for emergency shelter services will help improve the movement of people into more permanent housing solutions along the housing continuum, which then increases the response and access to resources for those living unsheltered.**

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony. NHCEH's mission is to be a statewide partner in reversing the trends NH is experiencing in its homelessness rates and making safe, stable housing accessible to everyone. As such, we support the additional funding that the passage of SB406 would bring to an already financially strained system. If you have any questions or would like any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at jchisholm@nhceh.org.

Respectfully submitted,



Jennifer Chisholm, LICSW, MLADC
Executive Director