



Saint Mark's Episcopal Church

Deacons: The Rev. David Bustin
The Rev. Rebecca Grant

Testimony of the Board of Trustees of St. Mark's Home for Women

In Support of
LD 208 – An Act to Amend the Charter of St. Mark's Home for Women in Augusta
February 26, 2013

Senator Valentino, Representative Priest and members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary, my name is Joseph Riddick and I am Treasurer to the Board of Trustees for St. Mark's Home for Women and I am providing testimony in support of LD208 at the request of the Trustees.

As proposed in LD208, the name of St. Mark's Home for Women would be changed to St. Mark's Home. This is the third time, since the original legislation was passed in 1871, that the Trustees have come before the legislature to change the name of the Home.

In 1870, Allen and Eliza Lambard bought the Dr. Snelling home which was adjacent to the campus of St. Mark's Episcopal Church. The purpose of the purchase was to gift the home and property to St Mark's Church. In 1871, the Maine Legislature enacted a private and special law to incorporate "St. Mark's Home for Poor and Indigent Women". In 1964, the trustees asked that the name be changed to "St. Mark's Home for Needy Women" and in 1981 the name was changed to "St. Mark's Home for Women". In 2013 we are asking that the name be changed to "St. Mark's Home".

When the Home was gifted to St. Marks' Church, the Trustees were charged with serving poor and needy women in the community. That vision and mission continues until this day. St. Mark's Home is one of several outreach programs and ministries operated at the church to help those in need in our community. Through these various programs, the Trustees have their fingers on the pulse of the needs of the community.

The challenges of managing and maintaining St. Mark's Home are significant. St. Mark's Home is a 17 bed facility that is licensed by the state of Maine as an "eating and lodging" facility. We have always been non-denominational in our admission policy. We provide a safe, secure home-like setting for women who can live independently; we are neither a medical nor a health care facility. Our staff prepares and serves three meals a day to residents; we coordinate recreational activities, we have public spaces for women to gather and entertain, and we provide private bedrooms for all residents.

Our Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Stephen Lane, has challenged all churches and programs in the diocese to be strategic about the future direction of programming and services. The bishop asks us, "Where is our front line and how do we provide ministry and services at the front line?" The Trustees have been in intentional conversation for the past three years about our programming at St. Mark's Home. For 142 years, the Trustees have been responsive to the changing needs and trends in the community and the needs in 1871 are not the same as we are facing in 2013. Of the nine women currently living at the home, we continue to fulfill the original intent of the gift by providing financial assistance for eight of them to live at St. Mark's Home. Our core mission of providing services to those in need continues to this day.

We believe that in 2013, the front line for St. Mark's Home for Women has changed again. The challenges of operating a facility at 50-60% capacity is not efficient and effective and we are not meeting the needs of the community when we do so. We are fortunate that through the generosity of people we have endowments and trusts which enable us to continue to provide financial assistance to women who live at the home, however these resources are finite and we believe it is not a good use of physical and fiscal resources to continue in the current mode of operations.

The Trustees and staff have surveyed safe, secure community housing in the surrounding area to determine need and availability. We have conducted discussions with people in the church and the community about needs. What we have heard is that St. Mark's Home provides a unique service in the community and that there are unmet needs to be filled.

The proposed name change will provide the Trustees with the flexibility to address the needs. It will allow us to finish the feasibility study of admitting men to St. Mark's Home. Our financial models show that by expanding our base of potential residents, we will continue to meet a basic tenet of the original gift to provide safe secure housing for people in need. We will continue to provide housing to women and expand those services to men thus filling more rooms. By expanding our resident population by including men we will be better positioned financially and will actually draw down less from our endowment and trust thus securing our future.

We are aware that the change from St. Mark's Home for Women to St. Mark's Home will present us with challenges as well as opportunities. The Trustees have been, and will continue to be, in conversation with staff and residents about how to integrate men into our residential program. The change in our charter will allow us to finish this important conversation and plan for the transition into the future. We have met the needs of the community for in the past and through our request, we believe we will be positioned to meet the needs in the future. We ask for your support of our request.

Thank you for your consideration.