



Maine Association of
Recovery Residences

844 Stevens Ave. 1st floor REAR, Portland ME 04103

www.mainerecoveryresidences.com

Testimony of Ronald D. Springel, MD - Executive Director

Maine Association of Recovery Residences

Testimony: Ought NOT to Pass

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Ron Springel, a resident of Scarborough. I am a retired addiction medicine physician and currently the executive director of MARR, the Maine Association of Recovery Residences. I am a person in long-term recovery, representing the organization.

- MARR is a 501 c-3 Maine non-profit organized in 2016.
- **We serve the entire state and currently inspect and certify 67 recovery residences with 700 beds in 11 counties.**
- **Our certification criteria are national, evidence-based standards of the National Alliance of Recovery Residences. These standards include numerous fire safety standards.**
- We have a staff of 3 FT employees, 11 volunteer board members, and several consultants and other volunteers.
- We are funded by the Maine Office of Behavioral Health and via grants from the Pew Charitable Trusts, and others.

~~When I first heard of Representative Landry's Bill, LD 109, I was eager to review its contents as any effort to improve safety in a RR gets my attention. However, my heart sank when I realized it was just a misnamed effort to undo the hard work MARR and many others put into passing LD 353 in 2019. It was at this very committee the bill was heard, passed unanimously, went under the gavel and was signed by Gov. Mills. Why did MARR and other recovery advocates need the protections of LD 353?~~

Beginning in 2016, the year MARR was founded by six dedicated recovery residence operators who wanted to see Maine adopt the national standards ~~developed in 2011 by NARR~~, we repeatedly saw roadblocks put in front of would-be operators when they tried to open a recovery residence in their town or city. Such efforts, by town officials, occurred in Sanford, Biddeford, Brewer and several others. ~~Anyone familiar with recovery residences knows the Housing operators took the opportunity to educate local officials that recovery house~~ residents are people in early recovery from substance use disorder, and therefore a protected class under the ADA and Fair Housing Act.

~~Anyone who researched the C-caselow knows and federal rulings have clearly reinforced the eat requirement that ingRRs be treated as anything other than the same as~~



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a family home. Any other treatment of these houses breaches anti-discrimination safeguards. That is why, in 2019, AG Aaron Frey submitted his opinion that. "Our office was advised to allow these substance recovery homes to operate without the sprinklers that would be otherwise be required by law." Assistant Fire Marshall Richard McCarthy put in writing his department's position saying essentially the same thing.

This bill would repeal the Maine law (Sec. 1. 25 MRSA §2452, sub-§4) that considers RRs as single-family homes for purposes of fire safety. To put this in perspective, RRs would again face local officials that have put up roadblocks and required sprinkler systems in recovery residences. In a survey taken last week of our membership, ... we estimate we would lose in excess of 300 beds if sprinkler systems were required. Of the 67 RR in operation today, 40 % of the operators without sprinklers would have to close.

~~One could look at LD 109 as an effort, albeit uninformed, to genuinely improve recovery residence safety. Or, one could make a different interpretation. Is it a coincidence that this bill was submitted the day after a constituent of Mr. Landy notified her town she was planning to open a RR?~~

~~3 minutes.....~~

In 2021, the most recent year for which data is available, there were over 6000 structure fires in Maine with 27 fatalities. (State Fire Marshall's Office) In that same year, Maine suffered well over 600 drug overdose deaths. And 2022 may will be even higher. Recovery residences serve as safe places for people in recovery. Losing over 300 beds means that many fewer safe places for people in the very early days, weeks, and months of recovery, and perhaps more overdose deaths.

~~If LD 109 were passed, and LD 353 were repealed, RR would once again be at the mercy of local officials, and we would experience the same roadblocks as in the past. In a survey taken last week of our membership, ... we estimate we would lose in excess of 300 beds. Of the 67 RR in operation today, XX % of the operators would have to close with a loss of 300-356 beds.~~

~~If the sponsors of this bill are serious about improving RR safety, I urge them to withdraw this bill and join us in meaningful legislative efforts to provide funding to a RR Safety Improvement initiative that could fund advanced fire protection systems to operators. As one RR operator, who happened to be an engineer told me recently, smoke alarms save lives, sprinklers save buildings. Would it not be a tragedy to pass a measure that might save a few buildings at the sacrifice of many many lives?~~



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In the following testimonies, you will hear from Amanda Ricci of Farmington, who has fought for months to open a RR, from Scott Pardy, an operator working miracles in Bangor who will share his experience with the state fire marshal's office in 2019, From Brittany Reichman and Madison Weymouth, MARR inspectors who will detail their stringent fire safety guidelines, and via ZOOM, MARR board president Alison Webb, author of Recovery Allies, who will share more details about the organization's mission.

I urge the committee to vote Ought Not To Pass on LD 109.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ronald D. Springel, MD

Scarborough, ME

01-30-2023

What organizations are opposing LD 109?

