

Cullen Ryan  
Portland  
LD 1116

April 25, 2023

Re: LD 1116 – An Act To Provide Rural Sober Living Housing For Mothers

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine (CHOM). CHOM's small staff works collaboratively with service providers across Maine to house hundreds of people experiencing homelessness, particularly the longest stayers in homelessness, victims of domestic violence, and homeless Veterans – all of whom require supportive housing, including recovery residences. I am a member of the Statewide Homeless Council and also chair the Maine Homeless Policy Committee, the Maine Continuum of Care Board of Directors, and the ESAC Long Term Stayers Committee.

I am testifying in strong support of LD 1116. This bill requires the Maine State Housing Authority to contract for the construction of at least 15 housing units, to be located in certified recovery residences and in counties with a county seat of no more than 35,000 residents. The certified recovery residences are required to serve mothers recovering from substance use disorder and promote reunification with minor children and are required to be staffed with peer-to-peer staff. The bill establishes the Rural Recovery Residence Fund to receive funds to support the certified recovery residences. The bill requires that the Maine State Housing Authority distribute funds through a competitive bid process to grantees, who will provide a minimum of 1:1 matching funds.

More than 107,000 individuals died of drug overdoses in the US during 2021, a 15% increase from 2020. Maine has one of the country's highest numbers of fatal drug overdoses and a continuing rise in homelessness among women, and families with children. Overdose deaths are steadily rising with new record numbers of deaths every year. In 2022, 716 people died of overdoses. In 2021, 631 people died, and in 2020, 502 people died. That number had never exceeded 200 prior to 2014. Substance use disorder, poverty, and homelessness frequently interconnect and set the stage for generational barriers to healthy and productive lives.

Members of this population with long-term homelessness are up to 29 times more likely to be in the hospital, and up to 57 times more likely to be in jail when unhoused, than when housed. Simply put, this population ricochets through our most expensive emergency systems when unhoused.

Recovery residences work. The reasons are obvious; no one will overcome their substance use disorder if they don't have a place to live. No one will recover without support. Recovery residences provide both. We lack them in rural areas. This bill aims to take an important step to correct that.

Good things happen when people have housing and the support they need for success. People recover, reunite with family, pursue further education, secure gainful employment, and participate positively in society. Please support this legislation that will accomplish all of this and more.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to provide testimony.