



March 10, 2025

Re: LD 215, An Act to Establish a Program to Assist Residents of Large Recovery Residences

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Brian Townsend, and I am the Executive Director of Commonspace. Commonspace offers programs for adults experiencing challenges related to homelessness, substance use, mental health, trauma, and legal system involvement in Greater Portland and in the mid-coast. Our programs included supportive housing, housing supports and navigation, community recovery centers, jail reentry, and emergency food and shelter programs.

I am testifying in strong support of LD 215, An Act to Establish a Program to Assist Residents of Large Recovery Residences, with the disclaimer that I do not believe, based on our agency's experience supporting Recovery Residence programming and our significant networking within the existing Recovery Residence industry, that this assistance should be limited to programs with twenty or more residents, of which there are few, and fewer still which are structured to support individuals who are eligible for municipal general assistance.

Recovery Residences have played a key role in Maine in reducing fatal and non-fatal overdoses, providing residents with opportunities to experience recovery, establish healthy patterns, and build strong, positive relationships. For individuals impacted by poverty, homelessness, and legal systems involvement, which is the population at highest risk of overdose, thoughtfully developed Recovery Residences provide an opportunity to break away from patterns of substance use and behaviors that have contributed to cycles of homelessness, incarceration, and the constant risk of overdose and adverse health outcomes.

Two supportive housing programs run by Commonspace, in partnership with Community Housing of Maine, serve as examples of the value of the model of Recovery Residences that are targeted to support particularly complex populations, while also serving as examples of the challenges such programs face in seeking to sustain their operation and existence as a community resource.

Commonspace and CHOM operated Beacon House (for women) and Patty's Place (for men) as Recovery Residences that were supported for almost two years by the Recovery Residence Pilot Program through MaineHousing and the Office of Behavioral Health. During this time, the two Residences experienced noteworthy success in creating spaces of safety and recovery for individuals who entered directly from the streets or from the jail, following on years of

homelessness and complex substance use. All residents were GA-eligible. These two Residences, adequately funded, supported multiple individuals with initiating and sustaining recovery, reestablishing contact with children, reentering the workforce, moving on to independent housing, and removing themselves from tragic patterns of homelessness, overdose, and incarceration. As word spread about the Residences' impact, we began to receive referrals from other Recovery Residences which were not designed to support individuals with these complex, challenging backgrounds.

The end of the Pilot Program ultimately signaled the end of Beacon House and of Patty's Place as Recovery Residences. The loss of public funding meant the loss of this resource. Commonsplace was faced with the decision of either changing our model to accept only individuals who could self-pay, or of changing our housing programs to vouchered, supported permanent housing programs in support of the population we had been serving. We chose the latter, in order to maintain the housing programs in service of the population for whom resources are least likely to exist: our community members who have experienced challenges such as chronic homelessness, generational poverty, and legal systems involvement, each individual being demonstrably GA eligible.

The mechanism established through this bill will result in the development of Recovery Residences that support our most vulnerable community members, at a time when this resource, for this population, has essentially ceased to exist. With substance use also having a major impact on homelessness and the homeless response systems in our communities, Recovery Residences that provide the hope of recovery for individuals experiencing homelessness also reduce strain on these systems, addressing this type of homelessness at its root cause.

Please support LD 215, with the removal of the restriction to 20+ bed programs. If enacted, this will provide for the development of new Recovery Residences that support this most vulnerable population, with profoundly positive community impacts. With this public investment, Commonsplace and CHOM would eagerly return Patty's Place and Beacon House to their original and intended use as Recovery Residences for individuals emerging from chronic homelessness, complex substance use, and lives of trauma, chaos, and the ever-present risk of overdose.

Sincerely,

*Brian Townsend*

Brian Townsend, Executive Director

Commonspace