

Testimony in Support of LD 1328 – An Act To Provide Access to Safe, Temporary Shelter for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

Good afternoon Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and esteemed members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee,

My name is Kelly Cookson, and I am writing to voice my strong support for LD 1328. As a queer Mainer, I am honestly surprised and deeply saddened that we even need a bill like this—one that simply requires the Maine State Housing Authority to ensure access to appropriate, peer-led supportive housing for members of the LGBTQIA+ community. And yet, here we are.

It is my sincere hope that after reading and listening to testimony today, you will not only support LD 1328, but champion it as a moral and practical necessity.

People with substance use disorders (SUD) are among the most vulnerable in our communities. Members of the LGBTQIA+ community are as well. When someone exists at the intersection of both—queer and navigating recovery—they are at significantly elevated risk of housing insecurity, violence, and discrimination. And they are often left behind by systems that were never built with their identities in mind.

While data on LGBTQIA+ people and SUD is still underdeveloped due to underreporting and systemic invisibility, the studies that do exist are striking. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), an estimated 20–30% of LGBTQIA+ individuals live with a substance use disorder, compared to about 9% in the general population. That's at least twice the rate, if not more. This disparity is not because queer people are inherently more prone to addiction—it is because of trauma, stigma, social rejection, and lack of access to affirming care.

When it comes to homelessness, the statistics are equally stark. LGBTQIA+ youth make up up to 40% of youth experiencing homelessness, despite being only a small fraction of the general population. Transgender adults, particularly trans women of color, experience housing discrimination, assault in shelters, and disproportionately high rates of chronic homelessness.

Shelters and recovery housing are often inaccessible or unsafe for queer and trans people. Misgendering, homophobia, and transphobia are not rare occurrences—they are regular barriers to recovery and survival. Peer-led, affirming housing options are not a luxury. They are life-saving.

LD 1328 acknowledges that people in recovery deserve shelter that honors all parts of their identity. It also recognizes that peer-led programs are not only more affirming, but more effective in helping people achieve and sustain recovery.

This is not a question of politics. This is a matter of public health, safety, and basic human dignity. Maine has an opportunity to set a precedent here—to say that all people, regardless of who they love or how they identify, deserve access to safe, supportive housing on their path to healing.

Please support LD 1328. Because recovery should not come with the condition of erasure.

Thank you for your time and commitment to equity and justice.

Sincerely,
Kelly Cookson