



Sophie Warren
P.O. Box 1
Scarborough, ME 04070
Phone: (207) 450-0765
Sophie.Warren@legislature.maine.gov

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
2 STATE HOUSE STATION AUGUSTA,
MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

Cross Building, Room 209
May 12, 2025, 10:01 AM

Testimony of Representative Sophie Warren Presenting
**L.D. 1946, An Act to Clarify the Eligibility of Certified Recovery Residences
for Bridging Rental Assistance Program Housing Vouchers**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and respected colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to present L.D. 1946, An Act to Clarify the Eligibility of Certified Recovery Residences for Bridging Rental Assistance Program Housing Vouchers.

L.D. 1946 proposes a small but vital clarification to ensure that an individual residing in a certified recovery residence is eligible to apply for a BRAP (Bridging Rental Assistance Program) voucher, as long as the individual meets all other eligibility criteria. The BRAP program follows an approach like the Housing First model, offering rental assistance upfront to adults living with serious and ongoing mental health conditions and co-occurring substance use disorders. The program primarily supports people transitioning out of psychiatric hospitals, residential treatment facilities, and homelessness programs across Maine^[1].

L.D. 1946 was inspired by a powerful moment during one of Maine Recovery Action Project's (ME-RAP's) statewide listening session tour this past summer^[2]. In one of the many conversations held with community members across Maine, a person living in a recovery residence shared their experience of trying to access stable housing. Despite being in recovery and working hard to rebuild their life, they reported that they were denied a BRAP (Bridging Rental Assistance Program) voucher—simply because they were staying in a sober house.

There has been a record of confusion at the provider, administrative, and client levels regarding whether recovery residences are considered *sober housing* and thus ineligible for BRAP. This confusion seems to stem from guidelines under the **ESG: Emergency Solutions Grants Program** that narrowly define eligible settings as *transitional housing*, a category that includes shelters, specific treatment facilities, or correctional institutions, but not *permanent housing* or *sober housing*. From my research, individuals living in recovery residences are considered “housed” for the purposes of housing voucher eligibility. That technicality disqualifies them from housing supports like BRAP—even though their housing is temporary, and often part of a structured recovery plan. In some cases, people have been told they’d need to leave their recovery residence and enter a shelter to qualify for help. That’s not only counterproductive—it puts recovery at risk. L.D. 1946 was drafted to change that.

Certified recovery residences are transitional by both design and function. They provide time-limited^[3] environments where individuals in recovery from substance-use disorder receive support while transitioning from acute care, incarceration, or homelessness to stable, permanent housing. As of May 8th, 2025, the average length of stay in a MARR-certified recovery residence is 5.7 months. These residences provide a range of evidence-based services, frequently including structured peer support, recovery coaching, and coordination with health care providers. Moreover, they explicitly operate on the principle of *housing as a platform for recovery*, a hallmark of transitional housing under federal guidance.

I also want to briefly acknowledge a practical reality that may come up in this discussion. As of March 24, 2025, BRAP is temporarily not accepting new applications or awarding new vouchers due to the unprecedented need for assistance and limited available funding. This pause, while deeply concerning, does not diminish the importance of L.D. 1946 — in fact, it underscores it. Clarifying eligibility requirements now is a matter of long-term policy alignment.

When funding levels are restored, and I hope they will be, given the scale of need across Maine, we must be ready to equitably and effectively distribute that assistance. Ensuring that people in certified recovery residences are not excluded by outdated definitions or administrative ambiguity prepares our system to serve those in early recovery who are doing the hard work to rebuild their lives. In moments of scarcity, it's even more critical that we are clear, consistent, and fair about who qualifies for support. L.D. 1946 is not about expanding the pool of eligible applicants — it's about making sure those already eligible aren't unintentionally shut out of the very programs meant to support them.

Allowing individuals who live in recovery residences to apply for BRAP and for BRAP vouchers to be used in these certified residences would not expand eligibility criteria; it would merely clarify and expand the options available to those who are already eligible. In the context of Maine's ongoing housing crisis, such clarification is essential. Every safe, supportive housing option should be accessible to people experiencing homelessness and recovering from substance use disorders.

Moreover, there is no risk of losing this funding if used for this purpose. We would be far from the first state to make this inclusive addition. It's important to note that eligibility and implementation can vary within states, often influenced by local Continuums of Care (CoCs) and specific program guidelines:

- Ohio^{[4][5]} has recognized recovery housing as a vital component of its housing continuum and has policies supporting the use of ESG funds for eligible recovery residences.
- Massachusetts' Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities^[6] has developed written standards for ESG-funded programs that encompass recovery residences meeting specific operational and service delivery standards.

- The California^[8] Department of Housing and Community Development administers ESG funds and has included recovery residences as eligible transitional housing options, provided they meet HUD's criteria.
- Oregon^{[9][10]} has enacted legislation to improve the quality of recovery housing and has mechanisms to include certified recovery residences in ESG-funded transitional housing programs.

While we can look to the actions of other states as important examples, we will be acting consistent with our state in recognizing established goals, principles, and needs of our state. L.D. 1946 will provide the necessary technical clarification to ensure recovery residences are recognized as transitional housing for the purposes of BRAP eligibility, bringing Maine's policy in line with both the spirit of federal guidelines and the practical needs of its residents.

I ask the committee to vote Ought to Pass on L.D. 1946. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have for me or follow up with experts for the work session. Thank you for your time and consideration.

-
- [1] <https://www.shalomhouseinc.org/what-we-do/housing-services/subsidies/bridging-rental-assistance-program/>.
 [2] 2024 ME-RAP Summer Listening Session Report, <https://tinyurl.com/2024ME-RAPListeningSessions>.
 [3] <https://www.mainerecoveryresidences.com/hssp>.
 [4] <https://narronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Building-Recovery-Toolkit.pdf>.
 [5] https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/195f09_2f80e8e1c4e9432fbc8448aec9adf19d.pdf.
 [6] <https://www.mass.gov/doc/written-standards-and-policies-and-procedures-for-esg-and-coc-funded-programs/download>.
 [7] <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/executive-office-of-housing-and-livable-communities>.
 [8] <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-and-funding/programs-active/emergency-solutions-grants>.
 [9] <https://narronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/State-Policy-Guide-for-Supporting-Recovery-Housing-2018.pdf>, Page 3, 10.
 [10] <https://mhacbo.org/media/NATIONAL.OVERVIEW.RECOVERY.HOUSING.January.2020.pdf>.