



May 6, 2025

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55 Portland Street  
Portland, ME 04101  
207.775.0026  
[info@preblestreet.org](mailto:info@preblestreet.org)  
[www.preblestreet.org](http://www.preblestreet.org)



Good morning, Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee,

My name is Julie Orrego, and I am the Advocacy Supervisor at Preble Street. Preble Street's mission is to provide accessible, barrier-free services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty and advocate for solutions to these problems. Preble Street operates 16 programs throughout Maine, and its staff works daily alongside many individuals and families who struggle with substance use disorder (SUD).

Preble Street supports LD 1328, An Act to Create Housing and Recovery Services for LGBTQIA+ Individuals. This bill acknowledges what we at Preble Street witness daily: that recovery is difficult and must be rooted in safety, dignity, and belonging.

Substance use disorder affects people from all walks of life, and most will face shame and stigma even as they seek recovery services. For individuals who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community, there may be additional barriers, including discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Many members of this community have experienced trauma, rejection by family, and discrimination in healthcare settings, resulting in a deep mistrust of support systems. LD 1328 addresses these challenges head-on by creating three recovery residences that are safe, inclusive, and led by peers who identify as both LGBTQIA+ and individuals in recovery. This bill will create more beds and understanding communities, serving as vital spaces where people can heal without hiding their gender identity.

According to the [2023 Maine Shared Community Health Needs Assessment](#), from 2017 to 2021, 5.1% of adults identified as gay, lesbian, and bisexual, and 1.4% identified as transgender. 16.4 % of gay or lesbian individuals and 23.3% of bi-sexual individuals reported that cost was a barrier to accessing healthcare.

Preble Street's Health Services conducted a planning grant funded through the Maine Health Access Foundation to gather insight from clients who use substances. This grant focused on obtaining information on client needs and services to reduce fatal and non-fatal overdoses and specifically hired people with lived experience to develop a survey alongside Preble Street Health Services staff. 102 surveys were conducted by peers targeting three neighborhoods in Portland: Bayside, Waterfront District, Deering Oaks, and three of Preble Street's Housing First Programs. Through these surveys, we found that clients who identified as members of the LGBTQIA+ community expressed a lack of recovery spaces specific to them.

50 years of turning hunger and homelessness into opportunity and hope

This bill is powerful because it recognizes that recovery is not one-size-fits-all. It affirms that LGBTQIA+ Mainers deserve recovery spaces that understand their lived experiences and meet their needs with compassion, expertise, and respect.

We urge this committee to support LD 1328 and take a meaningful step toward more equitable and effective recovery services in our state. At Preble Street, we have heard firsthand from individuals who avoided or left treatment programs because they felt unsafe or misunderstood. We have supported people who told us that being misgendered or judged during their most vulnerable moments led them back to homelessness or substance use. LD 1328 will change that. It affirms that healing must happen in a space that sees and respects the whole person. Let's make Maine a place where everyone, regardless of sexual and gender identity, can recover with dignity.

Thank you for your consideration.

