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Representative Laura Supica introducing
LD 1116, An Act to Provide Rural Sober Living Housing for Mothers
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, I am Representative Laura Supica and I am honored to represent part of Bangor here in the Maine Legislature. I am here today to present **LD 1116, An Act to Provide Rural Sober Living Housing for Mothers.**

Imagine this scenario: you've been trying for months, maybe years, and finally you are able to stay clean long enough to fully detox. For whatever reason, this time you were able to make it stick, at least for this moment. Quitting is hard, but what comes after is equally daunting. It's staying clean, finding a place to live, finding meetings, a community that's interested in staying sober, making sure your kids are safe, have clothes on their backs, a roof over their head and aren't ending up in the minefield that is the foster system. All of that, and you're just barely on your feet.

First up, you need to find a supportive place to live, but the few that you can find that have room tell you "no children over walking age are allowed." So what do you do? You fight like hell to keep your kids and to stay sober, all on your own. You don't go to those support homes. You don't get that help. You just grit your teeth and "try harder." But "trying harder" only goes so far in the battle against addiction – a foe so formidable that it digs its teeth in for generations, alters your brain chemistry and defies free will. A fight against that can't be done alone, but that's the reality for so many mothers and parents grappling with addiction and trying to retain custody of their kids. Most people don't have the ability to pause their parenting responsibilities while they focus completely on their own recovery. And they shouldn't have to. Addiction impacts the entire family and a successful recovery process should too.

Mothers with substance use disorder face unique challenges, including stigma, limited access to healthcare and lack of housing. For these women, finding safe and stable housing is crucial to their recovery journey and that of their children. In rural Maine, finding suitable housing can be particularly challenging due to the limited availability of resources and support systems. Without safe and stable housing, these women are at risk of relapse and losing custody of their children, further compounding their struggles. The need to address this issue is urgent.

Family-centric housing and peer-to-peer recovery support is the answer for Maine. Studies show that safe and supportive housing during outpatient substance use treatment is essential for successful and lasting recovery.¹ The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) finds that peer support for those in recovery can be especially successful, particularly when offering family-centric and culturally appropriate services.² LD 1116 offers this type of experience. But I don't need a study to show me that this model results in successful outcomes. I see it every time I walk into the Bangor Area Recovery Network (BARN), I see it at every community event celebrating recovery and I see it everyday as more of my friends - now family - go on to become role models for others trying to get sober. That's the kind of cycle I can get behind, and it's what LD 1116 can create.

LD 1116 would establish the Rural Recovery Residence Fund and require the Maine State Housing Authority to contract for the construction of at least fifteen housing units which are to include certified recovery residences. These housing units will serve rural communities with less than 35,000 residents and will be designed using a peer-to-peer staff model, specifically serving mothers recovering from substance use disorder. These homes will provide support for family reunification in a safe and thoughtful manner.

It is my intention that these homes be certified as ^{Maine Assoc.} ~~Medication-Assisted~~ Recovery Residences (MARR). MARR certified housing are designed to provide a safe and supportive environment for individuals in recovery, with a focus on helping them achieve lasting sobriety. It is important that appropriate and effective services are available to residents of these new developments. MARR establishes a useful standard from which to ensure these homes are achieving their objective of helping mothers and their families through their recovery process. I am open to continuing to discuss the specific level of MARR certification required of these homes in the work session.

During a time when Maine, and the entire nation, is facing a devastating opioid epidemic, we need to be thinking creatively about empowering individuals' recovery and addressing this devastating cycle of addiction. A report conducted by the Maine Attorney General's office last year found that, in total, 10,110 overdoses were reported in Maine in 2022, including 716 suspected or confirmed deaths. For December 2022, 928 people in Maine experienced a drug overdose.³ The number of children left behind and the communities destroyed by loss is unacceptable. We can do better and providing safe and supportive housing is a critical first step.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this important bill today. I am happy to take any questions you may have.

¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34657785/>

² <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/recovery>

³ https://mainedrugdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022-12-ME_Monthly_OD_Report_final.pdf