

Chairperson Beebe-Center, Chairperson Salisbury, Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee and Staff

My name is William McKenzie from Augusta, and I am a member of the board of directors of Tucker's House, a recovery residence for women in Bridgton. But I come here today to testify in opposition to LD 109 as a private citizen and treatment professional who has worked almost 4 decades in the field of substance use disorder. I have a master's degree in counseling psychology with a concentration in addictions treatment and am a licensed alcohol and drug counselor in the State of Maine. I have worked in detox units, inpatient facilities, outpatient programs, IOPs, residential facilities, in hospital settings and correctional centers. I have been a line counselor, a clinical supervisor, program director, and board member of a number of organizations. I was also an adjunct faculty member in the behavioral health department at Southern Maine Community College for twenty years. I am in long term recovery as well.

I have loved my jobs. I have felt privileged to be able to participate in people's recovery. What I have hated is the work required to overcome the obstacles put in the way of that recovery: inadequate funding, lack of transportation, a dearth of treatment programs offering appropriate levels of intervention, but mostly I have been frustrated by the bias, the stigma, and the fear surrounding this terrible brain disorder. It has been said that the opposite of addiction is not sobriety, the opposite of addiction is connection. I have spent most of my professional life trying to create a safe space for people to heal. And that means connection. That is fundamental to recovery. That is what recovery residences do. That is why they were designated single-family homes. That was done on purpose. Because we are family. We are all family.

LD 109 will result in a significant loss of residential beds at a time when death by overdose is continuing to impact the state, when housing shortages force too many people into too few shelters and when funding sources are increasingly challenged by an uncertain economy. This is not the time to place more barriers in the road to recovery. We connect best when we laugh together and when we cry together. That's what recovery residences provide. We are family. Do not deny us that.

I urge you to vote "Ought Not To Pass" on LD 109. Thank you.

William McKenzie, M.Ed., LADC