



Town of Winthrop

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March 10, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the committee:

I am Anthony Wilson, the Winthrop Town Manager. The Town of Winthrop supports passage of LD 215, An Act to Establish a Program to Assist Residents of Large Recovery Residences, and deeply appreciates our two state lawmakers, Representative Hasenfus and Senator Hickman, for sponsoring this legislation.

Our community, population 6,121, has two recovery homes. One of those is the state's largest with 53 beds; it is operated as a for-profit business. Its facility formerly operated as a nursing home. Within the past year, another nursing home closed in Winthrop. There is a distinct possibility that a recovery residence could be established in that facility, meaning our small community would then be home to two large recovery homes, plus a third 12-bed residence. Under General Assistance guidelines, the Town must provide \$695.25 per month in rent assistance for each GA-eligible resident of a recovery home. For the first 30 days of their stay, they are not allowed to seek employment.

In fiscal year 2022, the Town distributed \$4,210 in General Assistance. At that time, the Town typically processed one or two GA applications per month, a workload that was easily absorbed by existing staff. In FY24, following the recovery homes' establishment, that amount soared to \$65,511. Through the first eight months of FY25, we have distributed \$69,042 in assistance – on pace to eclipse **\$103,000 in General Assistance this fiscal year**. That means Winthrop taxpayers will shoulder some \$31,000 of that expense, a **twenty-five fold increase in three years**. Additionally, we had to hire an extra staff member to process the approximately 15 applications the Town receives from recovery residents each week. Local taxpayers bear 100% of that administrative cost. These days, the Winthrop Town Office rarely receives a GA application from an established town resident.

As the Maine Municipal Association and many of its municipal members have stated multiple times at the Statehouse, the current implementation of the General Assistance program has far exceeded its original intent – to provide a temporary helping hand up to Mainers who are unable to meet their basic life needs. General Assistance was never designed to provide sustained and perpetual housing. More emphatically, the GA program was certainly never meant to financially support privately owned and operated businesses. But in Winthrop, that is exactly how it is being used – as a vital revenue stream critical to the recovery home's business model and its financial success. That home seeks out and recruits residents in other locales in an effort to ensure its beds remain full at a cost of nearly \$700 a month each to Winthrop taxpayers.

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By removing these large homes from the GA program, Representative Hasenfus and Senator Hickman's bill would ensure that local taxpayers would no longer be on the hook for tens of thousands of dollars to not only support the home and its residents but to enrich its owners. To allow that to continue unabated would be unfair.

On behalf of the Town of Winthrop and its taxpaying citizens, I urge you to support LD 215.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Wilson', written in a cursive style.

Anthony Wilson
Winthrop Town Manager