



Consumer Council System of Maine
A Voice for Consumers of Mental Health Services

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March 25, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Curry, Representative Gere and esteemed members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee,

My name is Simonne Maline. I am the Executive Director for the Consumer Council System of Maine (CCSM). I am here today on behalf of the CCSM to testify in strong support of **LD 748 "An Act to Increase Bridging Rental Assistance Program Housing Voucher Funding to Reduce the Current Partial Waiting List and Increase Housing Vouchers for Persons Living with Mental Health Challenges"**

The Consumer Council System of Maine is a public instrumentality written into State Statute by the Maine Legislature to serve in an advisory capacity and to provide legislators with guidance and advice regarding the delivery of effective and appropriate adult mental health services from those served by them.

We are very grateful to Rep. Golek for putting this bill in for our organization and working with us to bring the topic of BRAP funding before you.

I had to change our testimony this weekend. Late Friday we were made aware of a change by DHHS, Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) moving the total funding side of BRAP from a partial waitlist to a full waitlist. If this does not sound significant warning bells for all of you, I am here to ring the bell.

We saw the change of how much an individual paid towards their BRAP voucher change in 2021. Historically, 51% of a person's income was paid by individuals at that time kept them as a priority status for Sect 8. It was dropped to 40% by the State. We knew then that this may result in a decrease in vouchers overall and we also saw how rent burdened people already living in poverty were. This is a challenging choice to make. In 2020 there was a surplus of vouchers available and today the demand is so high that there are no new vouchers available for anyone regardless of need.

BRAP is an absolute lifeline for those living with mental health challenges and is the cornerstone needed for everyone but more acutely for those living with significant struggles.

To meet the eligibility requirements for BRAP you need to qualify for Sect. 17 of MaineCare. This is not a voucher for any person in Maine. It was created at a time when the wait for Sect. 8 was around 2 years and that was a severe hardship for those needing a place to live when leaving a psychiatric unit, jail or meet the definition of literal homelessness and meet the eligibility requirements. Thus, the program was called a "Bridge" which was meant to get help hold on until you received a Sect 8 housing voucher.



BRAP was an important part of the AMHI Consent Decree, which recently ended in Maine after 30 plus years. Not that the Consent Decree could have fixed this, but it was an important piece of compliance by DHHS/OBH.

Without housing, a person will significantly struggle to move forward in their recovery. It is nearly impossible without stable housing. During a housing crisis statewide, our community is one of the most vulnerable and at risk for so many poor or deadly outcomes.

When we leave people with mental health challenges without the opportunity for housing, we will see our fellow peers in much higher levels of care or we will lose them all together. This is a fiscally responsible bill.

Please join us in supporting those that need our support more than most. We cannot let those in need of BRAP vouchers in order to leave a hospital, jail or are homeless to fend for themselves. Their lives are hanging precariously, and we need to rise to meet the need.

Thank you,

Simonne Maline

Executive Director
