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*Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher presenting*

## **LD 1328, An Act to Create Housing and Recovery Services for LGBTQIA+ Individuals**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development*

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing & Economic Development, my name is Representative Laurie Osher, and I represent House District 25, which includes part of Orono. I am proud to be here today to introduce **LD 1328, An Act to Create Housing and Recovery Services for LGBTQIA+ Individuals**.

This bill is about making sure that every Mainer who seeks recovery has access to a place where they feel safe, supported and affirmed.

To prepare this bill, I worked with leaders of Queercovery, a Portland-based peer-led support group for LGBTQ+ people recovering from substance use disorder (SUD), and Maine Recovery Action Project (ME-RAP), a grassroots network of Mainers working on statewide policies related to substance use. The goal of this bill is to address the shortage of safe and affirmative recovery housing options for LGBTQIA+ Mainers.

Maine has over 90 recovery residences certified by the Maine Association of Recovery Residences (MARR). According to the MARR Certified Recovery Residence Directory, only eight of the recovery housing organizations explicitly indicate that they serve LGBTQ+ individuals.<sup>1</sup> That's less than 10% of all certified recovery residences. Yet LGBTQ+ people, long considered to be 10% of the population, are far greater than 10% of the people seeking recovery housing in Maine. This is because LGBTQ+ people experience higher rates of substance abuse disorder than the general population. This is because LGBTQ+ people experience systemic discrimination, trauma and marginalization – all risk factors for experimenting with mood altering substances. Increased incidence of experimenting with mood altering substances and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mainerecoveryresidences.com/certification-1>

continued experiences of discrimination, trauma and marginalization result in this terrible statistic that LGBTQ+ people are far greater than 10% of the population of people with substance abuse disorder.

These numbers tell us that housing options are far too limited for LGBTQ+ people in recovery.

Thus far, there are no recovery houses led and governed by LGBTQ+ individuals. This is problematic because even when institutions and organizations state that they are open to serving LGBTQ+ people, Maine's LGBTQ+ people in recovery homes still experience discrimination against them from staff or other residents. We know that this does not help them in their quest for recovery. If our aim is assisting people in recovery, so far, we've missed the mark for LGBTQ+ people in recovery.

LD 1328 directly addresses these gaps. It requires the Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA) to contract for the operation of at least three certified recovery residences that are led and governed by LGBTQ+ individuals in recovery from SUD. These homes will provide both housing and services that are responsive to the unique experiences of LGBTQIA+ people in recovery. The proposed recovery residences will have training for staff that is specific to supporting to LGBTQ+ people.

I want to acknowledge the great work that MSHA is already doing in creating recovery housing through its Recovery Housing Program that makes funds available for qualified developers to produce, preserve and/or rehabilitate transitional rental housing for households in recovery from a SUD who are low- or moderate-income.<sup>2</sup> This program is primarily funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

MSHA's experience with the development of recovery housing will be invaluable to the creation and administration of the LGBTQ+ Recovery Residence Fund, which is the funding mechanism proposed in this bill. This nonlapsing fund can accept both state appropriations and private donations. Funding will be awarded through a competitive bid process to ensure accountability and to support qualified organizations that understand both recovery housing and LGBTQ+ service delivery.

The bill also ensures geographic equity by requiring that one residence be located in an urban area, one in a mid-sized locality, and one in a rural community. The community size thresholds laid out in this bill attempt to create geographic size diversity to ensure greater accessibility.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.mainehousing.org/programs-services/housing-development/developmentdetails/recovery-housing-program](http://www.mainehousing.org/programs-services/housing-development/developmentdetails/recovery-housing-program)

Each of these residences will be required to:

- Include a central shared living space and provide LGBTQ+-specific support services,
- Employ at least two certified peer support staff—trained in Intentional Peer Support (CIPS) and Peer Recovery Coaching,
- And pay those staff a livable wage, in line with Maine’s labor law under Title 26.

I want to highlight that paying trained staff a livable wage ensures fair compensation for skilled work. Not providing such compensation would undervalue the support being provided and how much it costs to provide and operate recovery residences.

Let me be very clear: Anyone who meets the standard admission criteria will be eligible to live in these homes—regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. This bill is inclusive, not exclusive.

This bill is not just about bricks and mortar—it’s about meeting people where they are. It’s about helping people heal in environments that affirm who they are, not force them to hide it. It’s about improving recovery outcomes by building peer-led, community-rooted homes where people can truly rebuild their lives.

In closing, I ask this Committee to support LD 1328 because recovery is hard enough already—no one should also have to fight for dignity, safety and acceptance as an LGBTQ+ person while trying to heal. This bill builds a stronger, more inclusive recovery infrastructure for all Mainers.

Thank you, and I urge you to vote Ought to Pass. I am happy to answer any questions.