

Testimony of Doug Dunbar from Hermon, Maine  
In Opposition to LD 109  
An Act to Improve Safety for Individuals Living in Recovery Residences  
Public Hearing: January 30, 2023

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and Members of the Committee, my name is Doug Dunbar. I'm a person in recovery, live in Hermon and appreciate the opportunity to express my opposition to LD 109.

While in government, I paid little attention to issues related to substance use disorders (SUD) or recovery—even as I was drinking myself to death. I was fortunate to work in the Legislature, as John Baldacci's press secretary in the Governor's office and his communications director in Congress. I've also worked for Senator George Mitchell and served as Maine's Chief Deputy Secretary of State.

The reason I mention this is because that three-decade career ended five years ago when I went to jail for over four months, followed by more than a year in the Penobscot County Adult Drug Treatment Court. While incarcerated, I realized how much we've failed as a society. Almost all of the individuals in jail with me were young, poor and sick.

Like me, most weren't bad people. Like me, they were suffering from one or more illnesses. In my case, I began self-medicating with alcohol in 2001 to deal with life-long concealed mental illnesses (OCD and anxiety) that spiraled out of control on 9/11 when the terrorist attacks occurred and I was working on Capitol Hill in Washington.

Sick with a substance use disorder, I made a series of very poor-choices, experienced six arrests and time in three Maine jails. Upon my release, I had a goal of opening a recovery residence, because the need was painfully obvious and few existed in the Bangor area.

Although I didn't have the resources to purchase a house for this purpose, I soon met Scott Pardy. At the time, he was preparing to open the first Fresh Start Sober Living House in Bangor. Scott took a significant risk in buying that first property. Today, in little more than four years, there are twelve Fresh Start houses. If you've given up on the idea that one person can make a difference, you haven't met Scott Pardy.

During the past four years, I've had the pleasure of lending a hand to the Fresh Start movement and watching it grow, save and improve lives, and make safe, dignified housing available to many people who might otherwise be struggling on the streets.

There are three key points I hope you'll keep in mind as you consider LD 109. First, as you know, Maine is experiencing a crisis of homelessness and lack of affordable housing. There are over 100 beds in recovery residences in the Bangor area (roughly 90 at Fresh Start houses). Without those houses, homelessness would be even worse. We can't afford to lose quality housing options.

Second, Maine is also suffering from an unprecedented crisis of overdoses and deaths. We need *more* substance use disorder (SUD) recovery supports, particularly sober housing options. Any unnecessary barriers, like those made likely by LD 109, would slow or end the ongoing expansion of recovery residences.

Third, as the saying goes, *'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.'* This bill seems to be searching to solve problems that don't exist in any meaningful way.

LD 109 poses a serious threat to recovery housing at a time when those homes are needed more than ever. The Maine Association of Recovery Residences (MARR) plays an active role in providing oversight of this housing and has meaningful safety standards.

LD 109 would be a step backward and potentially leave many people seeking recovery out in the cold—literally, in some cases. Please oppose this bill. Thanks for your time and consideration of this testimony. If there are questions or additional information is desired, please contact me by e-mail ([dougdubar@yahoo.com](mailto:dougdubar@yahoo.com)) or calling (207) 299-5626.

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Hermon  
LD 109

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