

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

My name is Paine Jennings and I am a resident of Biddeford, as well as a former resident of a New Hope Alliance sober living house. I am writing in opposition to the proposed new bill LD 109, which aims to repeal a current law regarding requirements for fire safety in certain buildings, one of them being sober living residences. At first sight, the bill reads as a safety proposal for the residents of sober living establishments. But I believe this bill will enact the opposite, endangering the recovery, and therefore life, of many in sober living.

Most sober living residences are run by individuals who want to help their community, they aren't run by large corporations who can spend tens of thousands of dollars without repercussions. If this bill is passed, the majority of sober living homes won't be able to install these sprinkler systems. Without providing a fund or a grant to relieve the financial burden LD 109 will impose, this bill effectively ensures that many of Maine's sober living residences will have to close their doors. This would be unacceptable.

In 2019, according to the Maine Drug Data Hub, 8.64% of our population struggled with substance abuse. That's over 115,00 people. According to current data, there are roughly 100 sober living residences in the entire state. These numbers illustrate that even with the available resources, many people can't receive the help they need. If this bill is passed, even fewer people will have access to the continued support sober living facilitates. That continued support can be instrumental in helping people in recovery to build the strong foundation needed to stay in recovery.

The Maine Association for Recovery Residences has fought for our communities to have safe sober living, and their certification standards for fire safety should be enough. If anything, this bill should be exclusive to sober living residences that are not certified, as the certified residences make every possible effort to ensure safety. This bill as it is currently written would be a detriment to all of our communities, by putting people who are currently safe and sober in jeopardy, and robbing people in the future of their chance.

Sober living was a huge help to me, it provided the support and cushion I needed to rebuild my life. I have over a year in recovery now, and the time I spent at the New Hope Alliance women's house contributed to my ability to get where I am today. Everyone who wants recovery deserves the same opportunity I had, and if passed this bill will not allow that. I urge you to vote against this bill.

Thank you for reading,
-Paine Jennings