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January 30, 2023

Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher in opposition to
**LD 109, An Act to Improve Safety for Individuals Living in
Recovery Residences**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Good morning Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. I am Representative Laurie Osher from Orono. Thank you for the opportunity to present my opposition to **LD 109, An Act to Improve Safety for Individuals Living in Recovery Residences**.

LD 109 repeals the law that allows recovery residences to be considered single-family homes or duplex buildings for the purposes of fire safety requirements.

My concerns about LD 109 are these: First, the bill proposes a change that is not necessary. Second, passing the bill puts Maine at risk of violating two Federal laws. Third, the requirements proposed in this bill will put a large financial burden on business people that own the buildings housing the recovery homes. Fourth, the chance of getting contractors to do the work in a timely manner is slim. As such, this bill will result in the elimination of some of the already too few places in which Maine's citizens recovering from substance abuse can live while they do the challenging work of transitioning to long-term sobriety.

The bill isn't necessary because the Maine Association of Recovery Residences (MARR) has strict guidelines for resident safety and facility operation. The fire codes for these homes are adequate to ensure the safety of tenants. Initial certification and annual re-certifications require a rigorous fire safety inspection. In fact, the Attorney General's Office stated that if this bill passes and recovery houses are required to install sprinklers, Maine would likely be in violation of the Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The estimated cost per recovery home to install sprinklers is between \$20,000 and \$40,000. Landlords who install the sprinklers would need to raise rental rates to cover the costs, making the recovery homes unaffordable to their clients. Where these costs must be covered by the recovery home operators, it is likely that they will be unable to afford the changes and will have to close. The sprinklers would need to be installed by plumbers with this specialized expertise and the openings created for the plumbing would need to be patched by finish carpenters. With the limited number of plumbers and carpenters and the demand for their services since the start of the COVID pandemic, the likelihood of getting the work done within a year of the bill's passage is slim. I mention this because I was a general contractor from 2010 to 2022, and I experienced the challenge of finding subcontractors to work at my client's homes. If the building owners can find and employ these contractors, the financial outlay will be significant. It is likely that if this bill passes, most of these homes will close.

Penobscot County is currently facing crisis level figures of drug overdoses and deaths and homelessness. Across the state, we need more recovery houses, not fewer. This bill compromises our ability to care for recovering Mainers, inhibiting the possibility that they will be able to find safe and stable housing with support services. These Mainers are our family members and they need us to refrain from putting roadblocks in their path to recovery.

MARR-certified recovery residences give people in early recovery one of the best environments for starting their healing journey. This law would take away this option for our constituents. I urge you to vote Ought Not to Pass.