

To whom it may concern,

My name is Daryl Blums, and I own and operate New Hope Alliance alongside my fiancée Katahli Stieg. We are both in long-term recovery and together we run two MARR Certified Recovery Residences, both a Men's and Women's program, located in Biddeford, Me. Though New Hope Alliance has only been operational since 2019, I have been involved in the operation of Recovery Residences since 2017 and Katahli and I both utilized the resources that homes like these provided in our earliest phases of recovery.

In the 8 years I have been in recovery, I have met hundreds—and likely thousands—of people with Substance Use Disorder seeking recovery. Though there are many hurdles these people will face, one of the most daunting can be access to safe, and supportive housing options that meet the needs of those with SUD. We consider safe, stable housing to be the fulcrum in which a strong recovery is built around. Additionally, the support network that operates within the Residences along with the structure provided offers a person in recovery the rudimentary building blocks of how to live life without the use of substances. These things are non-negotiable.

Often, people in early recovery haven't found the self-worth within themselves to believe that they deserve a substance-free life and the simplest things many of us take for granted may feel insurmountable. The slightest roadblock or setback is enough to put a person in recovery into the spiral of "see nothing ever works out for me" or "I don't really deserve this anyway". Part of the same cycle and pattern that cause people to use in the first place.

As an operator of these facilities, it takes a great deal of financial resources to start, actively run and maintain an operation. Though I wish we could provide our services free of charge, they take real money to run and we cannot operate without the funds the weekly or monthly rents provide. This obviously puts us in a predicament when someone is unable to pay their way. Though we try our best to work with residents in this situation as long as we can, eventually we must have them move on, or risk losing the entire business altogether—we are forced to think of the greater good of the house, the current residents, and those that will come in the future. This comes at the human expense of losing the individual and once again the person slips through the cracks.

Though a few resources in Maine have emerged recently to assist in the financial component, for those with SUD, Operation Hope, Rent Relief, Dignity for Opioid Users, etc. These are finite resources operating on grants, and may not always be available. Municipal General Assistance can be a resource, but we and our clients have not had particularly good luck with these

programs. If my memory serves me we have only ever received 230.00 for a single month per client, twice, but usually no assistance at all. While I don't believe there to be a bias against the client or those with SUD as a whole, from the outside it appears that in the absence of a traditional lease agreement, the Recovery Residence doesn't fit the model of how these General Assistance programs operate.

I was just contacted on Thursday by a potential client that is currently residing in a GA-provided hotel room that wants to move into our Recovery Residence. To do so he will now have to look elsewhere to obtain the funding necessary to move into our Home, as GA will not fund his rent expense at New Hope Alliance. I find this willingness to offer these hotel rooms at a higher cost (and risk to the individual) particularly untenable. How does this serve the individual or the community?

What is more likely to see an individual eventually find themselves self-sufficient? A vacant hotel room, with no support, no structure, left to their own devices and quite possibly roomed adjacent to another person receiving a GA-funded hotel room that's still fully engaged in a lifestyle of substance use. Or, a safe, clean, structured environment where the client has a healthy daily routine, and support in many facets, from 12 step meetings to monitored MAT, and even job placements. This puts them in the pathway of being able to contribute to themselves, their families, and their communities in a way that allows them to be self-sufficient and, hopefully never having to rely on resources such as General Assistance again.

We are dealing with an epidemic so vast that it is going to take more than people like ourselves to solve the issue at the community level. We need the support of our cities and towns to do more than merely house people, but rather, ready them for the opportunity of recovery and quality of life that all deserve.

In writing this, I am reminded of my time at what used to be Portland's 'Serenity House'. A residential treatment program where I was unable to work during my treatment, I was sent monthly to obtain my treatment expenses from General Assistance. Imagine if you would that General Assistance was unwilling to pay those expenses. Where would I be? What would my life look like today? And—not to sound dramatic—would I even still have a life?

I strongly encourage you to consider LD964 and the information presented today. Recognizing that SUD causes many more to suffer than the individual. Our families, neighborhoods, and communities are feeling the impact as well. Recovery Residences should be considered a lifeline to all affected by Substance Use. Requiring GA programs to offer assistance to people in

Recovery Residences is essential to those hoping to start a new way of life and truly be of service to everyone in our communities.

Thank you for your consideration,

Daryl Blums

New Hope Alliance