

April 4, 2021

LD 964, An Act to Expand Access to Certified Substance Use Disorder Recovery Residence Services

Good Morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Erika Farnlof and I am a resident of the town of Pembroke, located in Washington County. I am here to testify in favor of LD 964, An Act to Expand Access to Certified Substance Use Disorder Recovery Residence Services. This bill is important to people in recovery because it not only makes sure that they receive the same General Assistance benefits as anyone else in the same Municipality, but it also ensures that all residents have a safe place to live. The bill is important because it creates accountability for public funds by requiring recovery residences that receive State or local dollars to be certified by the Maine Association of Recovery Residences.

I am here today on my personal time and as a member of the recovery community, but let me speak to you about what I do for work. As the Division Manager of Healing and Recovery for Wabanaki Public Health and Wellness, I have seen first-hand how hard hit our tribal communities have been by addiction and lack of recovery resources that support both the healing of our individual tribal members that live with Substance Use Disorder and the communities as a whole. Through health surveys, needs assessments, and interviews conducted with Tribal Leadership, it was shown that there was an extremely pressing need for Culturally Supportive and safe recovery housing for tribal members living with Substance Use Disorder. Wabanaki Healing and Recovery was founded in 2020 and is focused on recovery and wellness services. Wabanaki Healing and Recovery houses the Center for Wabanaki Healing and Recovery, an indigenous substance use treatment and healing center, and Opportunity House, a recovery home for those with Substance Use Disorder.

Opportunity House, the first Recovery Residence for Indigenous Men to be opened in the State of Maine, is in the final stages of the certification process through the Maine Association of Recovery Residences. Being a part of this process has highlighted how important it is to have consistent set of guidelines to which all recovery residences in the State of Maine are held accountable. The certification process is designed so that individuals living with Substance Use Disorder have a healthy, safe, and supportive living community. This is vitally important to the healing and recovery of all residents within these programs.

Having a safe and supportive living situation is only part of the recovery process. As a woman in long term recovery and through the work that I am a part of within the Tribal communities in Maine, having equitable access to General Assistance funds is key to allowing our community members living in recovery residences to build a solid foundation in recovery. Financial insecurity is detrimental to this foundation. Equitable access is the operative word. People living with Substance Use Disorder face stigma from the public every day, they are coming into recovery residences with very little resources. Some come from incarceration, some from the homelessness. The stigma that they face comes in many forms, but two of the most prevalent are housing and access to financial security. LD 964 will commit each municipality in the State of Maine to grant residents living in certified recovery houses the same access to General Assistance as every other member of the community. This equitable distribution will help to set that foundation in recovery and financial independence.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee for your time and urge you to vote Ought to Pass.

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