



**Testimony of Richard A. Hooks Wayman
President & CEO for Volunteers of America Northern New England**

**Testimony in Favor of LD 964,
An Act to Expand Access to Certified Substance Use Disorder Recovery Residence Service
4/6/2021**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Richard Hooks Wayman, and I am testifying in support of LD 964 on behalf of Volunteers of America Northern New England (VOA). Volunteers of America Northern New England is a statewide nonprofit and faith-based organization dedicated to serving those in need. I serve as the President & CEO of VOA in Maine. Our administrative offices are in Brunswick and I personally reside in Portland.

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 needed to bolster the standards of care within recovery residences through certification of each home by the Maine Association of Recovery Residences and create a level playing field to ensure that residents receive the same General Assistance benefits as anyone else in the same municipality.

During the past year, and in the midst of the COVID pandemic, Volunteers of America opened our first recovery residence program, Twilight Drive Recovery House in Scarborough. Without the support and funding by the Department of Health and Human Services and MaineHousing, this residential program would not be possible. Despite the challenges of conducting any direct care and social service program during the pandemic, Volunteers of America believed this program was absolutely needed in Maine. As you are aware, more people died of opioid overdoses in 2020 than in any previous year. Volunteers of America, as a mission-drive organization serving low-income and disabled persons, believed that our organization must respond to the critical shortage of affordable and supportive housing options in our state.

Additionally, we felt it was important that our new program become certified by the Maine Association of Recovery Residences as a Level III Recovery Residence. True healing begins with a warm and welcoming home. Over the past few years, we had heard story after story of persons in recovery who were being charged exorbitant rents while receiving little to no quality social services to enable them to be successful in their recovery.

The term we heard from many community stakeholders was there was a 'wild west' culture that allowed some landlords to set up unregulated sober homes, charge high rents for shared rooms, and then offer poor services leading to a revolving door of evictions. People in recovery deserve a chance to lead lives of self-determination and to achieve their full potential. Without decent housing, professional social services, and connection to community resources and spiritual grounding, most individuals will not succeed in recovery or become contributing members of their community. Recovery residences should be high quality homes with professional social services, standards, and policies. LD 964 further these goals and will save lives.

Thank you for your sacrifice of public services to the citizens of Maine. Thank you for considering my remarks in support of LD 964. I'm happy to answer your questions.