

Rob Korobkin
Courage House - Gorham, ME

Hello. My name is Rob Korobkin. I own and operate the Courage House in Gorham - it's a 20-bed men's recovery and reentry house. I also serve as both a Landlord and Board Member for two other recovery housing organizations, Journey House and Breaking the Cycle. And in total, I oversee seven recovery houses and around 70 recovery housing beds across the state, making me the single largest provider of recovery housing in the state of Maine.

As everybody today has said, standards are vital. For one, people in early recovery are vulnerable. If the public doesn't keep them safe, they won't be. And two, if Maine's going to spend more on recovery houses, whether GA or elsewhere, we've got to know who should get that money and who shouldn't.

But here's the thing - Maine already has a standard way of doing this exact thing. Look at Osteopaths, there's the public Board of Osteopathic Licensure, and then the private Maine Osteopathic Association. With social work, that's the public Board of Social Worker Licensure and then the private Maine Chapter of the NASW. For funeral parlors, there's the public Maine State Board of Funeral Service, and then the private Maine Funeral Directors Association. You get the point - there's at least 35 places with both a public board that does public licensing and certification and then a private trade association that advocates for the private material interests of private operators.

The reason we do this is obvious - it's a conflict of interest. Private trade associations like MARR don't represent the public interest. MARR isn't a 501c3 public benefit group; it's a 501c6 mutual benefit group. Which means that, legally, MARR isn't even chartered to represent our workers, our residents, or the community at large. And, frankly, it's not supposed to be. People like me who own sober houses, we deserve a private body that advocates for our shared, private, collective interests, both here in Augusta and elsewhere. The constitution protects our right to have OUR collective private voice heard.

But you know what? The public also has a right to be kept safe by public bodies that answer to you elected officials, not to private interests like MARR. The truth is, I might sometimes be at odds with a public board, but at least with a public board, there would be objective and professional people, with no conflicts of interests, adjudicating those disagreements. There would hopefully be practicing behavioral health professionals, public officials, and perhaps most importantly, people with experience operating publicly funded recovery residences - none of which MARR leadership currently contains.

Given how high the stakes are here, they really are life and death, I don't see any reason why we wouldn't just take the time to make a public board here as well? Because it's the way we solve this exact problem everywhere else. And we do that because it's the right way to solve the problem.