

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



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Testimony in support of LD 964, to the Joint Committee on Health and Human Services, April 6, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, distinguished members of the Committee.

My name is Peter Lehman and I live in Thomaston. I am a formerly incarcerated citizen and a person in long-term recovery.* I am here speaking for the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition. Our goal is to promote restorative practices to increase public safety and the health of our community.

I also spend much of my time working with the Maine Prisoner Reentry Network. Bruce Noddin and I meet with men and women before they are released and help support them through their transition into our communities.

Housing and recovery loom large in our work. Change is difficult. This is nowhere more daunting than the process of transition from an intensive institutional environment back into a community. The transition itself is change—moving is always stressful.

But recovering people are faced with the additional task of implementing the changes in their own lives that are essential to recovery. They are moving from a narrow and controlled environment, often replete with disempowerment and helplessness, into an almost dazzling and immense social environment.

A multitude of persons, places and things await to trigger thoughts and feelings that threaten to overwhelm them, along with their own abiding and often reinforced sense of shame and stigma.

This is the fragile beginning of a new life and it is not surprising that this new beginning often collapses or is crushed. “Critical ingredients for recovery such as hope, empowerment, self-determination, and a new valued sense of self, are clearly in double- or triple-jeopardy for the mental health consumer who is also a criminal offender.”¹

¹ Wesley Bullock, PhD., Gayle H. Wuttke, Melissa Klein, and Heidi Bechtoldt, “Effectiveness of a Forensic Diversion Program in Promoting Recovery.” (State Mental Health Agency Services Research, Program Evaluation, and Policy Conference, Washington, DC, 2001)

As you all know, Recovery Residences fill a vital role in supporting this process. Not just any “sober house” will do. It is of utmost importance that we have standards and the kind of quality that truly support recovery and change.

We support the concept of certifying recovery residences but believe it is too important a matter to leave to a trade association.

We urge you to embrace the idea of requiring state certification. We understand that developing the necessary criteria and process is already underway in the Office of Behavioral Health.

I also want to talk about the frustrating situation with general assistance in supporting women and men in recovery. In some jurisdictions, GA assistance is routinely denied for people in recovery residences.

Doing our reentry work, we continually run into this roadblock. It makes our work much harder. Sadly, it threatens the chances of successful recovery and reentry for our clients.

We strongly urge you to support mandating General Assistance funding for people in certified recovery residences.

Thank you for your attention and support.