

Ashley Reny  
Journey House Recovery - Executive Director

Hi. My name is Ashley Reny. I'm the Executive Director of Journey House Recovery. We're a 501c3 nonprofit organization that operates five low barrier recovery residences across Maine, including in some of the communities that have been hardest hit by the opioid epidemic, including Sanford, Lewiston and Auburn. I love doing this work. All six of us Journey House staff people are survivors of both substance use disorder and incarceration, and we're all dedicated to operating the sort of programs that help some of the most vulnerable people in Maine get their lives back on track.

Journey House Recovery, as an organization, has always believed strongly in the set of operating standards put forward by NARR, the National Alliance of Recovery Residences. And not just the physical standards around the amount of space that each resident gets in their bedrooms, or the ratio between the number of beds to the number of bathrooms, which is most of what MARR currently inspects for, but also the more intangible values that the NARR standards describe, which MARR doesn't really look at. With Journey House, all five of our programs collaborate closely with both Maine's professional behavioral health system, as well as Maine's criminal justice system, at both the county and state level. Last year, four of our five housing programs were included in the Maine State Housing Authority's pilot program, and the \$130,000 that we received from the government through that program proved vital in enabling us to provide well over 8,000 nights of high quality recovery housing last year alone to our residents, many of whom are very low income.

Unfortunately, as warmly as I feel about the NARR standards, I just don't hold that sort of fondness for the Maine Association of Recovery Residences. If MARR is supposed to be a professional licensing board, then why don't any of their leaders have experience running the sort of publicly funded, medically-integrated houses that Journey House operates and that Maine needs so badly? If they want to have so much public authority, why does their Board always meet behind closed doors?

MARR also doesn't really feel like the shared trade association of all of us recovery residence operators. The truth is the MARR board has never offered me or any of the other Journey House leaders a vote or a say in any of their decisions. In fact, MARR's leadership just doubled our organization's mandatory dues and made it clear to us that if we didn't immediately pay almost \$500 to their private association, our organization's public funding would be in jeopardy.

As such, I strongly recommend that the members of the HHS Committee vote to table this proposed legislation until such time as the Office of Behavioral Health is prepared to offer an accountable, competent and trustworthy approach to doing this work.