

Fresh Out
4 Stewart Lane
Augusta, Maine 04330

April 6th, 2021

Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Brandon Tobey. I am a resident of Augusta and a constituent of Rep. Justin Fecteau. I am here today to testify in favor of LD 964.

I began my recovery in a recovery residence, after leaving incarceration. At that time general assistance was available to recovery houses in Augusta. I accessed their services for a few weeks, got a job, and got off in less than a month. If it hadn't been for GA, I never would have gone to the recovery residence, to begin with, let alone be doing what I am doing now.

Today, I am the owner and operator of a low-barrier recovery residence, Fresh Out, modeled after the type of housing that I had access to. I have never accepted general assistance before because GA told me in the beginning that they would no longer pay for recovery housing - simply because it is a recovery residence.

I reluctantly changed my mind when a guy, a guy who reminded me a lot of myself when I entered recovery, begged me to go down and try it. He had just gotten out of jail and was really trying to stay sober. I went with him against my better judgment and surrendered all of my intimate financial statements to them to explain why my rent is so high.

By high I mean - \$500 a month per person - the lowest rental fees in the entire city. I am going to explain it to you too. I pay the following bills for my house:

- Rent - \$2350
- Drug Tests - \$450
- Insurance - \$160
- Internet - \$120
- Electricity - \$100
- House supplies (trashbags, toilet paper, cleaning, etc) - \$100
- Netflix - \$20
- Prosocial Events for Residents - \$200

For a total of \$3380 a month. We have 8 beds available for rent at \$500 a month, for a total income of up to \$4,000 a month. That is if all of the beds are full the entire month and everyone pays on time.

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I never kick anyone out of my house based solely on an inability to pay and there have been months where I had to take money directly out of my pocket to cover all of the bills because of it. I am not making money on this endeavor. I essentially work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for free and in return, I get a room in my house.

When I showed the GA office all of these bills, they told me that the only ones that they were interested in were rental costs and utilities. They added those costs up (\$2450) and divided it by the number of beds to calculate how much they would pay for the person to live in the house. It was right about \$300 a month.

I took the guy in for a few days at that cost and was going to look around for other churches or programs that would help him. But by the time we got to the house, the guy was so upset and felt like a burden that he ended up leaving and using drugs.

He returned to the GA office a few weeks later looking for housing and they put him up in a hotel. I'm not sure exactly what GA pays for a hotel room a week but I promise it's more than \$500 a month - probably closer to \$500 a week. Had they only just helped the guy get into my house, the guy might have avoided a relapse and the city could have saved a bunch of taxpayers' money.

Furthermore, the practice of asking recovery residences about their bills is discriminatory. They would never ask any other type of housing to open their books. I'm not asking for anything crazy here. I am just asking that they pay the same amount that they would pay for any other type of housing.

Please vote ought to pass.

Thank you,
Brandon Tobey