

Heidi Wheaton
Breaking the Cycle - Millinocket, ME

Hello. My name is Heidi Wheaton. I'm the executive director of Breaking the Cycle. We're a residential program, up here in Millinocket, for women in recovery from substance use disorder. We opened our first building last summer, which is a classic Level 3 recovery residence, and we hope to soon open a number of supervised apartments, where the women who are part of our program now can go on to live good lives with their children.

In some ways, MARR has been a great resource for our new organization. It's offered our small team here in Millinocket a chance to meet other recovery residence operators from around the state and learn more about how other people in Maine are solving the same problems we are. Ron and Brittany have made the three hour trek up to Millinocket twice now, to walk through our building and help us build a safer, more responsible program. It's really been great to be part of a private trade association like that.

Breaking the Cycle is also one of the first recovery houses in Maine to receive financial support from the Maine State Housing Authority. Without the \$50,000 we got from MSHA, I'm not sure how we even could have gotten our program off the ground successfully. I'd love to see Maine put a lot more public money into other programs like ours, whether from GA or elsewhere, and I believe strongly that we need a public licensing body, so we know which houses should get that money, and which shouldn't.

But here's the thing that's never made any sense to me.

Why does this private trade association and the public licensing body have to be the same group?

It just seems to me that they're such different things. One's an apple. One's an orange. Both can be really good. Both can be really helpful. But they're not the same. A public licensing body should be objective, with no conflicts of interest. It should be accountable to you, our elected officials and the Maine community at large, not just a small group of us private operators. A lot of us operators don't seem to agree with each other a lot of the time, especially when it comes to questions like medication. I'd much rather be licensed by a neutral governmental body, than a small private group in Portland, most of whom don't seem even to share my values particularly.

So, as much as I'd like to see this bill go through eventually, 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.