



*Maine State Legislature
Augusta, Maine 04333-0002*

February 26, 2024

Shannon McDonnell, Chair
Bruce Burns, Vice Chair
Winthrop Town Council
17 Highland Avenue
Winthrop, ME 04364

Dear Winthrop Town Councilors:

Chair McDonnell, Vice Chair Burns, and members of the Winthrop Town Council, as you already know, three new recovery residences have recently opened in Winthrop, including a 45-bed facility, resulting in some challenges for the General Assistance (GA) program.

It was a pleasure meeting with Chair McDonnell, Town Manager Wilson and GA Administrator Flier a few weeks ago to discuss the impact the recovery residences are having on GA. We also thank you for inviting us to attend the community discussion regarding this matter.

This letter is intended to provide a basic overview of recovery residences in Maine and the associated funding responsibilities for both the State and municipalities.

We understand that this is something new to our community, and given the large capacity at the new residence on Route 133, it is important to educate ourselves about what recovery residences are and what the impact will be on our community.

While we advocate for the State to take the lead in addressing the opioid epidemic, it's imperative to acknowledge its impact on every community, including our own. Together, we must confront this challenge and strive towards recovery as a unified front, and build partnerships between State and municipal government, as well as community partners, recovery residences and the residents themselves.

To begin, it's crucial to distinguish between various types of recovery residences in Maine, namely certified residences and uncertified residences. Under current statute¹, recovery residences do not have to obtain certification to operate. As a result, anyone can rent a house and operate a recovery residence. However, state statute requires that recovery residences must be certified to receive any municipal and state funding sources or other incentives, such as being considered a single-family home for the purpose of the fire code. Certified houses are much more regulated with qualified oversight by experts who understand best practices and provide the evidence-based recovery support needed for a successful recovery home.

1. <https://legislature.maine.gov/legis/statutes/5/title5sec20057.html>

In Maine, the certifying body is the Maine Association of Recovery Residences² (MARR). MARR plays a pivotal role in establishing and upholding best practices, offering education, support, inspections, and certifications for recovery residences across the state. To become a certified recovery residence, the residence must meet national best practices standards³ and provide recovery support services for people in recovery from substance use disorder. The types of services that a recovery residence must provide to become certified depends on the level of certification that the house is seeking, with all houses requiring an alcohol and drug-free environment and the social model of recovery.

A level 1 or 2 recovery residence, which are the most common type of homes, are essentially a family home where people in recovery act as peers to each other and support one another in their recovery. They go to meetings together, they make dinner together, they have house rules, and hold weekly house meetings. The residence provides them a safe place to stay and assistance as they transition to finding gainful employment and moving out to a home or apartment of their own. Level 3 and 4 recovery residences are a more acute care type setting that provides a nursing level of care for patients. These patients are often in detox and require constant care and supervision.

NARR's four levels of service



People who live in a MARR certified level 1 and 2 recovery residence may be eligible for a GA contribution from the town⁴, if the tenants otherwise meet all other requirements for GA eligibility. In level 3 or 4 houses, GA from a municipality is not necessary, as the patient room and board is typically covered through their healthcare policy. Patients living in these residences are often eligible for MaineCare or private insurance.

It is my understanding that the recovery residences in Winthrop are certified by MARR or are in the process of becoming certified recovery residences. Specifically, the one on Route 133 is currently under review for MARR certification to become a level 2. Additionally, it is entirely possible, given the size and former use of the former nursing home that it, or a percentage of it, may become licensed as a class 4 facility, thereby qualifying for MaineCare and not GA, though the certification and licensing requirements for this level facility may take much longer than a class 2 residence. To fully appreciate the long-term financial impact of this residence, we need to determine what class residence the facility will be and when those classifications will be effective.

As stated above, the municipality may be responsible for qualifying GA payments for certain residences. Under current state law, 70% of all general assistance payments provided are reimbursed to the town from the state.

2. <https://www.mainerecoveryresidences.com/>
3. https://narronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NARR_Standard_V.3.0_release_11-2018.pdf
4. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ddMikIVA7EkpXKWIV-7QHg5WJAapaCsY/view>

There is currently a bill, LD 1664, which would increase that amount to 90%. We are supportive of this legislation and are hopeful it will pass both the House and Senate. However, the bill will need to receive funding by the Appropriations Committee before it can become law. Given the significant funding requests on the appropriations table, we do not want to make any predictions on whether this bill will be funded. However, we will be advocating for this funding and the benefit it will have to Winthrop.

Additionally, the State currently offers a recovery housing subsidy program that provides stipends to recovery houses to cover residents' stay for the first 60 days. Though it cannot assist every bed, as there are more beds than available funds, the program could be expanded.

Finally, Maine is set to receive roughly \$235 million over the course of 18 years in opioid settlement money. Though this money is not tied to recovery residences, the funds must be used to address the opioid epidemic. With some effort and targeted planning, we could advocate for the opioid settlement monies to be used to help provide scholarships for recovery residences, offsetting the cost on the town for GA, and partnering with Winthrop's recovery residences in a more sustainable manner.

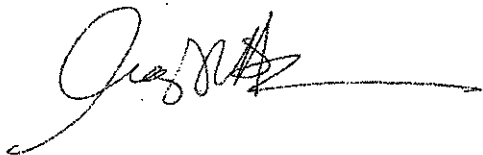
We understand that these residences are new to our community, and given the large capacity of the new residence on Route 133, it is important to know the potential impact on our community. This is also a statewide issue, and we believe that the State should assume the primary financial burden of this epidemic. Yet we must not forget that this is an epidemic that is affecting us all. It has had devastating effects on every community, including our own. We are all in this together, and it will take every community to recover together. We remain proud of what our town has been able to offer thus far and have every confidence that Winthrop can continue to set a positive example of how a small town can have a big impact on one of the State's most pressing concerns.

We want to thank you for your time, and we remain committed to working for a better tomorrow.

In solidarity,



Tavis Hasenfus
State Representative



Craig V. Hickman
State Senator

