

## POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

**BILL: HB 448 Certified Recovery Residences**

**POSITION: Favorable**

**DATE: 02/09/2026**

My name is Lauren Karnes. I am a Forensic Peer Recovery Specialist for the Maryland Office of the Public Defender. Forensic Peers are individuals with lived experience in both substance use/mental health recovery and the criminal justice system. Today I am testifying on my own accord and not as a representative of MOPD.

I am respectfully requesting that the Committee issue a favorable report on **House Bill 448, which requires that Maryland Department of Health (MDH) conduct at least two on-site unannounced inspections of each certified recovery residence annually.**

As a peer recovery specialist, my role is to walk alongside individuals during one of the most vulnerable periods of their lives. Many of my clients are recently released from incarceration, exiting detox or inpatient treatment, or reuniting with family after long periods of instability. Recovery residences are often their first experience of safety, structure, and accountability outside of an institution. When these homes are well-run, ethical, and truly recovery-oriented, they can be life-saving. When they are not, the consequences can be devastating.

House Bill 448 is a commonsense, preventative measure designed to protect residents and uphold the integrity of Maryland's recovery support system. Unannounced inspections are not punitive — they are protective. They ensure that certified recovery residences are consistently meeting the standards they claim to uphold, not only when they expect oversight, but every day.

Through my personal experience, I have seen how inconsistent oversight can allow unsafe or exploitative practices to persist. Clients have reported overcrowded and unclean living conditions, lack of basic safety measures, improper fees, limited access to recovery supports, and environments that undermine — rather than support — sobriety. Many residents are hesitant to speak up, fearing retaliation, eviction, or losing the only housing they have. This power imbalance makes routine, unannounced inspections especially critical.

As someone in recovery myself, I know firsthand how fragile early recovery can be. Stability, trust, and safety are not luxuries — they are necessities. A recovery residence should never add chaos, fear, or exploitation to someone's life. Unfortunately, without effective oversight, even certified homes

can fall short over time. Annual unannounced inspections help ensure that certification is not just a title, but a meaningful guarantee of quality and safety.

This bill also protects ethical operators who are doing the right thing. Reputable recovery residences that follow best practices should welcome accountability. Unannounced inspections help level the playing field by identifying bad actors who undermine public trust and tarnish the reputation of recovery housing as a whole. When unsafe homes are allowed to continue operating unchecked, everyone loses — residents, families, service providers, and the broader recovery community.

From a systems perspective, the stakes are high. When recovery housing fails, people relapse. When people relapse, we see increased overdoses, emergency room visits, reincarceration, and family disruption. These outcomes are far more costly — both financially and humanly — than proactive oversight. House Bill 448 is an investment in prevention, public safety, and long-term recovery outcomes.

Most importantly, this bill centers the dignity and wellbeing of people in recovery. Individuals living in recovery residences deserve the same basic protections as anyone else seeking housing. They should not have to choose between sobriety and safety. Unannounced inspections help ensure that recovery homes remain places of healing rather than harm.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 448. This legislation reflects compassion, accountability, and a commitment to doing recovery the right way. As a peer recovery specialist, as someone with lived experience, and as an advocate for the clients I serve, I believe this bill will save lives.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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