

Janet T. Mills  
Governor

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.  
Commissioner



Maine Department of Health and Human Services  
Office of Behavioral Health  
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March 23, 2023

Simonne Maline, Executive Director  
Consumer Council System of Maine  
219 Capitol Street, Suite 7  
Augusta, ME 04330

**RE: Consumer Council System of Maine -- BRAP Issue Statement**

Dear Ms. Maline:

We appreciate the thought and work the Consumer Council System of Maine (CCSM) has put into this issue statement regarding the Bridging Rental Assistance Program (BRAP). We recognize the important role BRAP vouchers play in supporting individuals living with mental health conditions as a foundation of recovery and reducing homelessness. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is committed to continuing to bolster the BRAP program for individuals living with mental health conditions. Housing is essential as the foundation for life improvement, and as such, should be without prerequisites beyond a typical renter.

In response to increasing market rates, the BRAP program increased payment standards to 120 percent of federal market rates (FMRs) across the state effective February 1, 2023. We would, however, welcome further input regarding aligning BRAP Payment Standards given the unprecedented increase in market rents in the state. We would welcome the opportunity to hear more input from the CCSM regarding how we can address increasing the time limits set to search for viable housing for participants in the BRAP program.

Everyone who is eligible for a BRAP voucher should be able to find adequate housing to meet their needs and housing first is the foundation of recovery. There is an ongoing need for access to affordable housing to support individuals with mental health conditions. We do strive to address individual needs for adjustments in voucher time limits and will look for ways to address this issue through our contracted BRAP rental assistance providers, behavioral health providers, and in collaboration with partners Maine Housing, Regional Homeless Council meetings, and the Continuum of Care. Your suggested ideas will be a helpful part of this process.

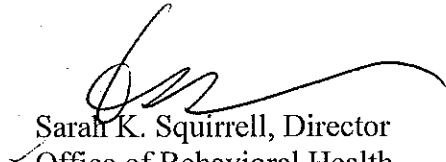
Although we cannot address specific commitments at this point, we will take your recommendations regarding increasing time limits and Payment Standard rates in cities and towns where available housing is not in line with market. As part of our work to support housing and supportive services for individuals living with mental health conditions as well as fulfilling

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our obligation to the Consent Decree, we are grateful for your attention to this issue and your input. We will look to engage with the CCSM for additional input as we move forward.

We hope the CCSM would be willing to collaborate with Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) to also look at ways the BRAP rental assistance program could help address both these issues.

Sincerely,



Sarah K. Squirrell, Director  
Office of Behavioral Health  
Department of Health and Human Services

SKS/mia

cc: Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D., Commissioner, Department of Health and Human Services