



Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine
The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive Director

Testimony in support of LD 967

**An Act To Make Possession of Scheduled Drugs for
Personal Use a Civil Penalty**

Sponsored by Representative Perry
April 30, 2021

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Good morning Sen. Deschambault, Rep. Warren and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice & Public Safety. My name is Malory Shaughnessy, I am a resident of Westbrook and the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. The Alliance, the statewide membership association for Maine's community based mental health and substance use treatment providers, advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Alliance in support of LD 967,
An Act To Make Possession of Scheduled Drugs for Personal Use a Civil Penalty.

If you have not yet read *Chasing the Scream* by Johann Hari, or [watched his TedTalk](#), you should. He highlights the decades of experience that have shown we cannot arrest and punish our way out of substance use and overdose deaths. LD 967 focuses on a practical way that can and should be taken to avoid many of the harms that flow from punitive drug laws and to instead promote proven, effective health-based interventions.

Substance use disorder is a health condition and not a crime.

We need to change our drug laws to save lives. Opioid addiction is a public health crisis. Decriminalization is an essential step to remove barriers to care and support, reduce stigma and discrimination, improve health and socioeconomic outcomes, and work toward a more just and compassionate society. We must stop treating people affected by substance use disorders as criminals instead of patients. We need a humane and public health-informed response to ensure people stay alive and have the best opportunity to live and thrive in their community.

The current war on drugs is also incredibly inefficient and damaging. In fiscal year 2019, Maine spent just over \$41,000 each year to incarcerate an individual in prison. Those are resources which could be applied to many better uses. Mainers who are currently incarcerated for substance possession would be much better served. Treatment and prevention are the pathways to defeating substance misuse, not stigmatizing its victims with felony convictions which will follow them for the rest of their lives, affecting their ability to find jobs, health insurance, and housing. Discriminatory enforcement of drug possession laws has produced profound racial and ethnic disparities at all levels of the criminal justice system as well.

**Thank you for considering these comments. Please vote not to pass and make
Maine a more humane and actually safer place.**