POSITION STATEMENT IN OPPOSITION


Presented to Maine’s Appropriations Committee

Monday, March 1st, 2021

NAMI Maine is in opposition to the Governor’s proposed Correctional and Public Safety Budgets. Maine continues to face the ongoing effects of an opioid crisis; 2020 shows a preliminary 512 overdose deaths, by far the highest rate yet, and the trend of almost 60 deaths in January 2021 indicates that the deadly trend is continuing.¹ We have shown that this is a crisis we will not incarcerate our way out of; substance use disorders are a health crisis that requires treatment in close balance with efforts to stem the flow of drugs into Maine. Increasing funding to MDEA and Corrections while not increasing the funding to mental health and recovery services will not solve the root problem. Nationally, one in three inmates has a mental illness.² Between 60-85% of those incarcerated in Maine enter with a substance use disorder, and many have faced childhood trauma.³

The United States’ CDC chief said that as of July 2020 we lost more Americans to suicides and overdose deaths than to COVID-19.iv This crisis must be addressed. While we applaud the support for the Options Initiative to support community crisis response for overdose prevention and response, funding needs to be directed to recovery resources to save the lives of Mainers. We need to increase the availability of residential facilities, treatment counselors, and medication assisted treatment for both our youth and adult populations. Mental illnesses are treatable. Most people diagnosed with a mental illness can experience relief from their symptoms by actively participating in an individualized treatment plan. As it stands now, Long Creek Youth Correctional Facility stands to receive more funding at $37 million that the Office of Behavioral Health Services reported spending on Children’s Behavioral Health Homes at $23.3 million, Targeted Case Management at $11 million, and Outpatient Treatment at $20.7 million during their 2020 fiscal report. With funding for juvenile corrections exceeding community-based services, these youth cannot successfully transition into a community with depleted programming and resources.

The Governor’s proposal to double the funding to the MDEA and increase the funding for Corrections represents an unbalanced response to the mental health crisis we face. This is not a problem that Maine can solve by arresting and incarcerating those with substance use disorder and/or mental illness. The number of Mainers being incarcerated with substance use and mental health disorders has increased every year since 2004.v The proposed budget turns our correctional centers into mental health facilities without providing adequate funding for recovery resources. It turns our state police into mental health clinicians without proper training. Both are strategies we have already seen fail.
ABOUT NAMI MAINE: Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state’s largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state’s mental health system through collaboration and education.