



CITY OF BANGOR

BANGOR CITY COUNCIL

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Testimony in Support of LD 859 – “An Act to Assess, Develop, Implement and Fund the Reuse of Existing Facilities at Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center to Provide Mental Health, Substance Use Disorder and Homelessness Services”

May 8, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Deborah Laurie, Bangor City Manager, and I’m providing testimony on behalf of the Bangor City Council in support of LD 859 – An Act to Assess, Develop, Implement and Fund the Reuse of Existing Facilities at Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center to Provide Mental Health, Substance Use Disorder and Homelessness Services.

The City of Bangor, like many communities in Maine, is seeing a surge in the number of people experiencing homelessness and in the severity of the substance use disorder and mental illness with which they struggle. Homelessness, substance use disorder and mental illness are negatively impacting our public spaces, neighborhoods, businesses, and hospitals. Individuals experiencing homelessness deserve our help. They are mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. They are waiting months if not years to find suitable housing. They are languishing in our hospital emergency departments because of a lack of mental health and substance use treatment options. They are dying in our communities in record numbers.

There can be little debate there is a tremendous need for more treatment options and for stable, supportive housing. There must also be a shared recognition that this is not just a local or regional problem, it is a statewide problem that deserves attention at the highest levels of state government. LD 859 is an opportunity for the State of Maine to take a leadership role in finding lasting solutions for a problem that is stymying communities across the state.

The Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center (DDPC) campus is located here in Bangor. We are well aware it has a 99 acre footprint with many underutilized buildings. What remains to be seen is the true condition of those buildings and their suitability for repurposing for much needed treatment centers, transitional housing, and long-term housing. The Department of Administrative and Financial Services has done a structural analysis of a number of buildings on the DDPC campus, but those results were not widely shared or discussed. We cannot afford to wait any longer. The time is now to review the findings of that analysis or to conduct another to determine how to best utilize DDPC resources to address what is arguably a statewide problem.

Approximately 30 acres of the DDPC complex are undeveloped and an ideal site for housing, including transitional, supportive, and long-term. The area has existing municipal water and sewer connections and is on a regular transit route. In short, it is an ideal housing site for those who desperately need it.

The Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center campus is, without a doubt, an underutilized resource for Maine people. The time is now to bring together stakeholders to discuss ways in which the campus can be better utilized for the health and well-being of the public and those most in need of housing, substance use and mental health care. As such, and on behalf of the Bangor City Council, I strongly urge you to pass LD 859 and to increase the utilization of the Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center campus.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to reach out with questions.

Deborah Laurie, City Manager, debbie.laurie@bangormaine.gov
Courtney O'Donnell, Assistant City Manager/ Director of Human Resources,
courtney.odonnell@bangormaine.gov
Richard Fournier, City Council Chair, richard.fournier@bangormaine.gov