POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

LD 1306: An Act To Include Crisis Response Services in Emergency Services Offered Through the E-9-1-1 System

Presented to Maine’s Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology

As the state’s largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of An Act To Include Crisis Response Services in Emergency Services Offered Through the E-9-1-1 System. NAMI Maine supports the implementation of Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) Program across the state. Through this work, NAMI Maine works collaboratively with emergency services, mental health providers, families and peers, and advocates in various parts of the state. NAMI Maine hears stories of contact with the 9-1-1 system in which law enforcement is dispatched due to regulations requiring their response when the more appropriate intervention would be the crisis system that the state has already invested in and developed.

In an analysis, by the Center for American Progress and Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP), of 5 cities across the country, call volume for non-emergency or non-criminal matter calls ranged from 23-45% of the total calls for service. These calls include civil, noise, or disorderly complaints, but also largely well-being checks or mental health calls. Approximately 97% of all police encounters end with no criminal charges being filed, largely due to these statistics. As the stigma regarding mental health and substance use disorders is being combatted, it is imperative that they also be de-criminalized. While many people call 9-1-1 due to a lack of awareness of additional resources, this further perpetuates false beliefs that individuals with a mental health challenge are more dangerous than the general public, when the fact is the statistics show that an individual with a severe and persistent mental illness is 11 times more likely to be the victim of a crime than to perpetrate one.

Through the CIT Program, many dispatchers have attended trainings in order to increase their knowledge and understanding. When discussions arise regarding diverting mental health calls that clearly involve no risk, they have consistently stated that they are not able to divert such calls, per policy and statute. NAMI Maine asks that you consider this alteration to the law in order to utilize the already present and funded crisis system in place. Many states have adopted this policy, diverting to developing programs. The State of Maine is fortunate that there is already a fully established and funded program in place.

NAMI Maine urges the committee to pass LD 1306 in order to send the clear message that mental health and substance use disorders are not criminal matters. Similar to an individual who is experiencing symptoms of a heart attack would receive emergency medical attention in their home, an individual experiencing a mental health crisis should receive crisis services in their home.

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.