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LD 540

68. I have been hospitalized voluntarily for "Mental Health Issues" in the state of Maine on average 68 times in 28 years. That is twice a year that MaineCare was billed for an Emergency room visit, a mental health crisis evaluation, a 5-10 day stay at a Maine inpatient psychiatric hospitalization, and a "step-down" intensive outpatient treatment program. Yearly, I was costing taxpayers thousands of dollars.

Why? I had no other place to go to find people who could provide me with emotional support, compassion, rest, and a sense of connection to others. I hadn't somewhere to go to find people who understood how I was feeling and what I was going through. Having had no community connections, friends, or family who had not taken advantage, hurt, or abused me, I had no place to go to stop myself from falling into a depression so deep that I was sure I would never resurface from it. I hadn't a place to go to catch my breath, rest, relax and regroup so I could soldier on.

So, I waited. Alone. Until I couldn't. Until my choices seemed distilled down to live or die. I always wanted to choose life. And I did. But I could not get there on my own without someone who cared and understood how hard it was to feel what I feel and live life this alone. So, I would go to my local ER. to find connection and hope.

Imagine if there was a place I could have gone that inspired me to keep going. To remind me that I had a community of people who understood and believed in my ability to move through the pain, heal, feel joy, and meaningfully contribute to my community and greater society. A place that would not have cost thousands of Maine citizen's hard earned dollars. A place that prevented the fall.

Please consider, dear legislative community, creating the funding, building of, and access to Peer Run Respite for our people in the State of Maine.