

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

LD 540 An Act to Establish Peer Respite Centers for Adults with Mental Health Challenges in Maine

Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
April 5th, 2023

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of LD 540 *An Act to Establish Peer Respite Centers for Adults with Mental Health Challenges in Maine*. The peer respite centers model has been found to divert individuals from the criminal justice system and other higher and more costly levels of care, such as hospitalization.

Maine has followed the national trend of reducing psychiatric hospital beds without increasing access to community-based providers. While we no longer hold individuals for decades in psychiatric hospitalization, we have replaced that form of institutionalization by holding a record number of people with mental illness within the corrections system: 70-80% of county jail inmates are on mental health medication, as is 60% of DOC's population. We also see a large number of individuals with mental health struggles receiving care in emergency departments, with 1/8 of all emergency department visits annually in the United States due to behavioral disorders. Peer respite centers have been demonstrated in other parts of the country as a cost-effective and supportive alternative. One study found that by implementing a peer respite center, inpatient psychiatric placements and emergency room visits for mental health crises decreased by 70%. Pierce County Washington reduced involuntary hospitalization by 32% by using certified peer specialists offering respite services, leading to a savings of 1.99 million dollars in one year. The resources and supports outlined in this legislation provide critical and best practice services for our neighbors.

It is clear that the risk of mental health crises has increased significantly. The solution in regards to building sustainable crisis services is not always to continue with the path that has been set forward but to ensure we are considering models that are leading other parts of the country in treating individuals experiencing a mental health crisis or challenge in the most respectful, least restrictive, destigmatizing, and decriminalizing manner, as well as best practice and cost-effective manner. Because of this, NAMI Maine, supports the passage of LD 540.

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.*

LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

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POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA

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