



**Written Testimony
In Favor of LD 291:
An Act to Support Young People Affected by Substance Use Disorder**

Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 291

April 10, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Tess Parks, and I serve as the Recovery Rising Coordinator at Portland Recovery Community Center (PRCC). I am writing to you today on behalf of Leslie Clark, PRCC's Executive Director, in favor of LD 291.

PRCC's mission is to provide support, education, resources, and advocacy for people recovering from and affected by addiction, and to spread the message of hope throughout the state of Maine and beyond. As a recovery community center, we know that many adolescent Mainers are affected by SUD and more resources are needed to support them in finding recovery.

A 2012 report from the US Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools noted that 85% of adolescents entering addiction treatment in the US begin regular use of alcohol and other drugs before the age of 15. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Adolescent Health, 62% of adolescents perceived no great risk from having five or more drinks once or twice a week. In Maine, the 2021 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey¹, reported that 10% of respondents (Grades 9-12) reported taking prescription pain medicine without a doctor's prescription or differently than how a doctor told them to use it at least once.

Recovery high schools have operated in the United States for the past 35 years. As of 2023, there are 42 US recovery high schools that are members of the Association of Recovery Schools. These secondary schools are designed specifically for students in recovery from SUD or co-occurring disorders. Although schools operate differently depending on state standards and available community resources, every school educates students on substance use or co-occurring disorders, meets state requirements for awarding a secondary diploma, intends that all students attending be in recovery and working a program of recovery, and available to any student in

¹ 2021 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey High School Detailed Report – Maine (Weighted)



recovery who meets state or district eligibility requirements². While receiving academic instruction students work on emotional skill acquisition, and the five Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) core competencies, which include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Although conceptual, LD 291, An Act to Support Young People Affected by Substance Use Disorder, introduces a model of secondary education that should be considered to bring to Maine. Students that attend recovery high schools have increased sustained sobriety, higher attendance rates, and increased GPAs in comparison to students that have returned to their traditional high schools³. Maine youth with SUD deserve this option for secondary education.

We want all people affected with SUD to have support and resources at all stages of their recovery journeys. We especially want young people to have access to programs that are geared towards adolescents, such as recovery high schools, so that more people can start a life of recovery sooner. When people enter recovery at younger ages, individuals and their families are spared years of pain and loss. Recovery high schools are an investment in the future health of Mainers, their families, and our communities.

We thank Representative LaRochelle and co-sponsors for introducing this important concept piece of legislation. We strongly urge this committee to vote in favor of LD 291.

Sincerely,

Tess Parks

If you have any questions, please contact:

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² Association of Recovery High Schools

³ Finch, Andrew, and Holly Wegman. "Recovery high schools: opportunities for support and personal growth for students in recovery." *The Prevention Researcher*, vol. 19, no. 5, Dec. 2012, pp. 12+. Gale One File: Health and Medicine.