



**Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine**  
*The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers*

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**Testimony in Support of LD 1204**

**"An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by  
Closing Coverage Gaps in the MaineCare Program  
for Incarcerated Persons"**

**Sponsored by Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross**

April 12, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and esteemed Health and Human Services Committees members. My name is Malory Shaughnessy and I am the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. The Alliance is the statewide association representing the majority of Maine's community based mental health and substance use treatment providers, providing services to over 80,000 Maine men, women, and children. The Alliance advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system.

On behalf of the Alliance, I am here today to speak in support of LD 1204, "An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Closing Coverage Gaps in the MaineCare Program for Incarcerated Persons." Individuals who have been incarcerated have higher rates of morbidity and mortality than the general population. As a population, people in prison exhibit a high burden of chronic and noncommunicable diseases (e.g., hypertension, diabetes, and asthma), as well as communicable diseases (e.g., hepatitis, HIV, tuberculosis), mental health problems, and substance use disorders.

According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, a representative sample of individuals released from correctional facilities noted that most had at least one physical health, mental health, or substance use problem, and nearly 40% of men and more than 60% of women in this population had multiple health conditions.<sup>1</sup>

Upon reentry into society, prompt and continuous management of these conditions often falls by the wayside as individuals who have been incarcerated face challenges enrolling in health insurance coverage, finding a primary care physician, making health care appointments, and refilling prescriptions. When formerly incarcerated individuals reenter their communities, they are at high risk of exacerbating existing conditions – particularly addiction and mental health issues – that were often integral to their criminal legal system involvement in the first place.

It is also my understanding that the sponsor of this bill, Speaker Talbot Ross, will be offering an amendment that would require the Department of Health and Human Services to submit a state plan amendment to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services that would allow access to federal funding for medical care provided to incarcerated persons eligible for MaineCare in county and regional jails beginning 90 days before discharge.

The Alliance wholeheartedly endorses this amendment.

<sup>1</sup> American Academy of Family Physicians. Incarceration and Health: A Family Medicine Perspective. Accessed on 04/09/23. <https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/incarceration.html>

This waiver would reduce the costs of healthcare currently placed on the shoulders of property taxpayers who fund our county jails and bear the costs of providing healthcare to incarcerated persons while they reside in those facilities for that 90-day period. It will also improve the health of incarcerated persons by insuring that needed medical care, including treatment for substance use disorders and other physical and mental health challenges will be fully covered, and will have continuity when they transition back to their communities. Doing this increases their chances for successful reentry into those communities. Successful reentry benefits all of us and successful reentry is more likely when serious health issues can continue to be treated immediately upon release from our county or regional jails.

Ensuring that these Mainers experience the best treatment while they are residents in a county or regional jail, and have a continuation in their coverage as they are released is the right thing to do. I ask that you vote ought to pass on LD 1204. Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions you have for me.