



102 Bishop Street,  
Portland, ME 04103  
207.553.2575  
info@portlandrecovery.org

**Testimony of Danielle Megalaitis  
In Favor of LD 1229:  
An Act to Support Peer Mentors for Parents Involved in the Child Protective Services System**

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

My name is Danielle Megalaitis and I am the Peer Support Supervisor at Portland Recovery Community Center. I am also a woman in long term recovery from substance use disorder and a Registered Peer Recovery Coach. I am here today to speak on behalf of LD 1229.

I struggled with addiction from the time I was a teenager. I was 19 when my oldest son was born. DHHS was involved before he turned one because of concerns of substance use. I remember this being a really scary experience. I was young and didn't know anything about addiction or recovery. I didn't have people around me who didn't use substances. I didn't know a different way. Neither DHHS nor my natural supports were able to help me develop an understanding of the concerns of my actions.

When my second son was born, DHHS was involved right away. I had a minimal understanding of recovery, I was trying, but my recovery was not linear and I was struggling to get clean and manage my MAT program. My second son was removed from my care. I didn't understand how to get myself into treatment, while also being a parent, trying to be present and available for my children. I didn't have anyone to help me.

When my third child, my daughter, was born, I wasn't in recovery, but I wasn't using hard substances. I was six months pregnant when I first saw a prenatal doctor. I was honest about using marijuana and my history with other harder substances. This led to CPS involvement after my daughter's birth.

CPS mandated I go to treatment if I hoped to reunify with my daughter, who was placed in foster care for 30 days. It really wasn't until I was made to go to treatment that I began to understand what recovery was.

Every time Child Protective Services were involved, the situation was traumatic. But maybe having a recovery coach could have helped. It was scary, I was in a fight or flight mode, because of the threat that I would lose my children.

Having a coach would have been a better solution, to help me develop the skills to live a life in recovery. Having an ally, someone I could talk to about my case to help me understand the CPS process. If I was struggling, it would have been helpful to have someone I could talk to without fear of repercussions.

If I had a Recovery Coach, I could have learned about the disease of addiction and about recovery. It wouldn't have felt like 'me against the system'. I would have had someone on my side, as long as I was doing the right thing.



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I could have learned from a coach that it wasn't that I didn't love my kids, but that I had an addiction. I could have learned that it is a disease, not that I am a bad parent. It could have helped me address the shame that I felt.

Since getting into treatment and living a life of recovery, I haven't had CPS involvement in my life. After living with my daughter in a treatment program for 9 months, we moved into another treatment program, where we lived for two years. Even now, I remain closely connected to recovery, both in my personal and professional life. I am grateful to be the best parent, employee, and daughter today that I know I can be.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Danielle Megalaitis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'D' and 'M'.

Danielle Megalaitis  
Peer Support Supervisor  
Portland Recovery Community Center