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**Testimony of Leslie Clark, Executive Director, Portland Recovery Community Center
In Favor of LD 1229:
An Act to Support Peer Mentors for Parents Involved in the Child Protective Services
System**

Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333
Re: LD 1229

April 21, 2023

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

My name is Leslie Clark. I am a person in long-term recovery and serve as the Executive Director of Portland Recovery Community Center (PRCC.) I am writing to you today in favor of LD 1229: An Act to Support Peer Mentors for Parents Involved in the Child Protective Services System.

Many parents involved with child protective services (CPS) in the state of Maine are affected by SUD and need support in finding and sustaining recovery. “Substance use continues to be a significant factor in the lives of many families involved with child welfare. In calendar year 2020... substance use was a risk factor in 50% of removals by OCFS.”¹ Additionally, “the impact of substance use, and, in particular, the opioid epidemic has significantly affected children and families. Beyond removal, when substance use is a factor in a case it takes, on average, an additional three months for children to reunify with their parents when compared to those cases that do not involve substance use.”²

As a recovery community organization supporting thousands of people in recovery throughout the state of Maine through peer based support groups, recovery coaching, and prosocial activities, we know first-hand the powerfully positive impact of peers support. Many of the people who come to our centers are parents and are working hard to break the cycle of addiction and its impact on their families. Peer Recovery Coaches support multiple pathways to recovery and assist people in finding and sustaining long term recovery – something that takes time and support to achieve. Ultimately, peer recovery coaches can assist CPS involved parents with strengthening their personal recoveries to be in a better position to provide a safe environment for their children.

¹ Child Welfare Annual Report, Calendar Year 2021, submitted January 4, 2022 Maine Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child and Family Services. https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/2021%20Child%20Welfare%20Annual%20Report_0.pdf 4.14.23

² Child Welfare Annual Report, Calendar Year 2021, submitted January 4, 2022 Maine Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child and Family Services. https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/2021%20Child%20Welfare%20Annual%20Report_0.pdf 4.14.23



The benefits of Peer Recovery Support Services have been established. “Peers understand substance use disorders and the recovery process because of their own life experience and can assist with engaging the parent in services to improve treatment and child welfare outcomes. Parents are often more comfortable confiding candidly with a peer because of their shared life experiences. Peers can reduce negative attitudes and stigma among agencies and community partners toward parents with substance use disorders.”³ Utilizing peer services has shown to improve outcomes for individuals in treatment for SUD, reducing substance use,⁴ leading to better medical adherence,⁵ reducing inpatient readmission⁶ and reducing criminal behavior.⁷

Furthermore, a brief presented by the National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare states that, “These... programs have demonstrated positive outcomes for participating families, such as improved treatment completion and recovery rates for parents, less time children spent in out-of-home care, and improved family reunification rates.”⁸ This bill will increase access for this type of resource in every county in Maine.

All people affected with SUD should have support in accessing recovery. This is especially important when CPS is involved and family reunification is at stake. Investing in peer recovery coach access for CPS involved parents in an investment in the future health of Maine families and their communities. On behalf of PRCC, I urge you to vote in favor of LD 1229.

Sincerely,

Leslie M. Clark, MSW
Executive Director
Portland Recovery Community Center

³ Timing matters: A randomized control trial of recovery coaches in foster care. Ryan, J. P., Perron, B. E., Moore, A., Victor, B. G., Park, K. (2017). *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 77 p. 178-184.

⁴ Rowe, M., Bellamy, C., Baranoski, M., Wieland, M., O'connell, M. J., Benedict, P., et al. (2007). A peer-support, group intervention to reduce substance use and criminality among persons with severe mental illness. *Psychiatr. Serv.* 58, 955–961. doi: 10.1176/ps.2007.58.7.955

⁵ Tracy, K., Burton, M., Nich, C., and Rounsaville, B. (2011). Utilizing peer mentorship to engage high recidivism substance-abusing patients in treatment. *Am. J. Drug Alcohol Abuse* 37, 525–531. doi: 10.3109/00952990.2011.600385

⁶ O'Connell, M. J., Flanagan, E. H., Delphin-Rittmon, M. E., and Davidson, L. (2017). Enhancing outcomes for persons with co-occurring disorders through skills training and peer recovery support. *J. Mental Health* 10, 1–6. doi: 10.1080/09638237.2017.1294733

⁷ Rowe, M., Bellamy, C., Baranoski, M., Wieland, M., O'connell, M. J., Benedict, P., et al. (2007). A peer-support, group intervention to reduce substance use and criminality among persons with severe mental illness. *Psychiatr. Serv.* 58, 955–961. doi: 10.1176/ps.2007.58.7.955

⁸ The Use of Peers and Recovery Specialists in Child Welfare Settings. National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare. https://ncsaacw.acf.hhs.gov/files/peer19_brief.pdf 4.14.23.