

TODD R. COLLINS
District Attorney

STATE OF MAINE

144 Sweden Street
Caribou, ME 04736-2353
207-498-2557
FAX 207-493-3493

KARI WELLS-PUCKETT
Deputy District Attorney

27 Riverside Drive
Presque Isle, ME 04769-2730
207-764-0504
FAX 207-764-2046

CHRISTIANA REIN
MATTHEW HUNTER
AMANDA BRIDGES
IAN M. ANDERSON
Assistant District Attorneys



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY AROOSTOOK COUNTY PROSECUTORIAL DISTRICT NUMBER 8

26 Court Street, Suite 101
Houlton, ME 04730
207-532-4294
FAX 207-532-1504

April 21, 2023

Susan Pinette, Clerk of the
Committee on Judiciary
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

SUBMITTED VIA EMAIL

RE: Public Hearing on LD1596

Good day Senate Chair Carney, House Chair Moonen, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee.

Thank you for this opportunity to present written testimony on the proposed legislation affecting Maine's criminal laws and access to criminal justice before you today. I am offering this testimony individually as the District Attorney for Aroostook County and not on behalf of any organization or other prosecutorial district.

I write in support of LD 1596. While we know that this Bill seeking to facilitate a Drug Court in Aroostook County is not a "silver bullet" or a complete answer to serious substance abuse problems in our communities; LD1596, never-the-less, can be a significant part of the solution.

While the ultimate causes of drug abuse and addiction are as varied and individual as those caught in its powerful grasp, the effects of drug and substance abuse are too well known to the law enforcement community and the friends, neighbors, and families of the abuser. Those effects are concrete, widespread, and often tragic.

Within the last several years, even in an often idyllic and rural County like Aroostook, we have lost too many people to the dire consequences of drug abuse – some have been hospitalized or have died from self-poisoning by overdose; some have been injured, maimed, or have died at the hands of an intoxicated substance abuser operating a motor vehicle or ATV; some have succumbed to the years of abuse and expired years before their natural time; others, compelled by a seemingly insatiable hunger and desire for drugs, have preyed upon their communities committing thefts, ranging from the petty – by pilfering money, property, and prescription medications from family and friends – to the absolutely destructive – by invading people's homes and stealing money and property, or by raiding medicine cabinets, or by stripping buildings of copper wire and plumbing; by assaulting or robbing others, often to either acquire more drugs or to settle some sort of drug debt, real or imagined; others resort to selling the very poison of their own addiction and spread their affliction to an ever-growing supply of new customers.

Our tools in responding to the drug problem are rough – jail and the threat of jail. Jail offers a deterrent, but only to those who will listen. Those who are not deterred often wait for a "bottom" before they seriously attempt to

remove themselves from the influence of drugs and other drugged people. Far too often, that “bottom” comes at the expense of others – usually in the form of significant criminal activity. I do not see how we can, in good conscience wait for someone to kill, injure, maim, burglarize, rob, or steal before we step in and demand a “serious” response to a serious problem. These are only some of the more significant and serious consequences of drug and substance facilitated crime and not the equally destructive, painful, and far-too-often tragic social and economic effects of drug and substance abuse – like babies born drug-affected or other children caught in the crossfires of addiction.

We can seek to reduce the demand of drugs by limiting the number of people in Maine who start down the path of abuse and addiction by enacting tough laws to discourage those who will listen from being experimental and casual users of illicit substances. We can attempt to limit the supply of drugs into Maine by making it riskier to import, possess, and deliver those drugs within our borders. We need people to enforce those laws. Additionally, we can seek to give current users the tools they need to successfully leave the drugged life behind and to escape the heavy gravity that illicit drugs and the drug scene provides and create opportunities for a successful recovery process.

As my initial commentary would indicate, the criminal activity surrounding the abuse of illicit substances is not limited to drug trafficking and drug “crimes” alone. The scope of drug related crime expands into nearly every corner of the criminal justice system; from OUI enforcement to petty and grand thefts, to home invasions and burglaries, to crimes of violence and retribution, and even to fatal self-poisonings and drug-induced vehicular homicides.

LD1596 focuses on the creation of a Drug Court in Aroostook County, which is both admirable and has the potential to significantly impact the lives of those Defendants in a positive and productive way. Ideally the creation of a Drug Court will have a positive impact across all facets of Aroostook County life. Increased education, increased access to treatment, and more treatment providers in the community are just some of those potential positive impacts.

The goal of any successful substance use program in the criminal justice system must balance the individual needs of a defendant without losing sight of the crime committed and the harm to the community that their conduct created. Accountability is an important facet of recovery. When we address the whole of the person, the good, the bad, and the in between then we can build bridges to successful reintegration with their community, even if those successes start small. As we gather small successes and build on them with the client, we will slowly exchange the external motivating factors of avoiding prison with internal, but concrete motivating ones like home, family, and work or education. Intervention will be a success when the client’s reasons for not doing drugs or alcohol outweigh their desire to use. In other words, we want to mitigate a defendant’s desperate desire to escape reality, not just by force and fear, but by making their reality better.

The drug problem facing Maine and Aroostook County is multi-faceted and complicated; and it requires a broad, community-based solution. LD1596 and the creation of a Drug Court in Aroostook County will be an integral part of that solution.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of LD1596. I apologize that I am unable to attend today’s public hearing, but if you would like to hear from me more, I will endeavor to be available to you at the time of the work sessions for this Bill.

Be Well and Stay Safe,



Todd R. Collins
District Attorney, Aroostook County