

TESTIMONY OF MEAGAN SWAY, ESQ.

Ought to Pass – LD 1719

An Act to Establish Substance Use Disorder Treatment Centers

Submitted to the

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

May 3, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, greetings. My name is Meagan Sway, and I am the Policy Director at the ACLU of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil rights and civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1719, which would establish two treatment centers for substance use disorder with at least 10 beds each, marking an important step towards providing access to crucial health care for people in Maine.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration estimates that between 7 and 9.22 percent of Mainers meet the criteria for drug dependence but are not receiving treatment.¹ This gap is due to numerous factors: decades of under-investment in community-based health care, a significant uptick over the past 3 years in the number of people turning to drugs and alcohol to self-soothe, and a lack of financial resources, among other things.

When there are insufficient treatment options and recovery supports available, society increases its dependence on the criminal legal system to address public health problems. Criminalizing people because of their health conditions violates principles of equal protection and due process of law, and, what's more, it is far less effective than treatment and support to achieve long-term recovery and stability. Passing this bill will be a small but significant step in recognizing the unmet need in our state, and avoiding harmful and liberty-denying techniques that have failed us as a state. We ask you to vote ought to pass.

¹ Maine Drug Data Hub, Treatment, available at <https://mainedrugdata.org/maine-drug-data-hub/maine-drug-data/treatment/>