



Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine

The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive Director

Testimony in Support of LD 1781

“An Act to Establish the Homeless Substance Use Disorder Service Program”

Sponsored by Representative Gattine

May 8, 2023

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Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committees. 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 1781, “An Act to Establish the Homeless Substance Use Disorder Service Program.”

This bill establishes the Homeless Substance Use Disorder Service Program to provide rapid access to low-barrier treatment for substance use disorder and stable housing to support recovery. This program is not limited to opioid use and provides additional services including transportation, community services and inpatient treatment services.

Substance use disorder is a complex and devastating problem that is affecting Mainers at increasing rates, including many Maine people who are unhoused. Homelessness and substance use often go hand in hand, with addiction and mental illness frequently contributing to the loss of stable housing and creating a cycle of poverty and despair.

However, with the right treatment and support, individuals struggling with substance use disorders can break free from the cycle of addiction and homelessness and achieve lasting recovery. These programs offer a range of services, including detoxification, medication-assisted treatment, counseling, and support groups, all tailored to the unique needs of homeless individuals. They provide a safe and supportive environment for people to address their substance use disorder and mental health needs and work towards recovery, often in conjunction with supportive housing programs that help people rebuild their lives.

Research has consistently shown that substance use disorder programs for the homeless can be highly effective in helping people achieve lasting recovery. For example, studies have found that homeless individuals who participate in these programs have significantly lower rates of relapse and improved mental health outcomes compared to those who do not receive treatment.

By supporting substance use disorder programs for the homeless, we can make a real difference in the lives of people who are struggling with addiction and homelessness. Not only will we be providing essential support and treatment to those who need it most, but we will also be helping to reduce the burden of substance use disorder on our communities and society as a whole. It is for all of these reasons that I urge committee members to vote "ought to pass" on this proposal.