

Sarah Johnson
Sanford
LD 1975

LD 1975, An Act To Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Controlled Substances

1/15/2024

Honorable Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Respected Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Sarah Johnson and I am a resident of Sanford. I have volunteered or worked full time as an educator in the Correctional systems of Maine and New Mexico since 2000. Through this work I have witnessed the ravages of substance use disorder, and I am writing to express my support for LD 1975.

The benefits to this bill are vast, including saving lives now, reducing crime and so prison and jail populations, and reducing recidivism. Maine's communities and economy need this bill which will greatly reduce the \$111 million spent yearly on arrests, prosecutions, defense and incarceration. The vast majority of my former students would thrive with the types of support this bill would afford, as they thirst for education and opportunity to work and contribute, but can not heal from substance use disorder by themselves.

Substance use disorder is a medical issue, and should be treated as such. Sending people with these health issues through the carceral system is an expense with no solution, negatively impacting those who need treatment, their families, and all of us.

We have 17000 citizens that we know of seeking treatment without access to it, and those in crisis have only a single 24/7 center in a geographically vast state. Once incarcerated, the prison and jail staff are burdened with residents needing intense mental health and medical care. They are not trained nor do they have the resources to provide such care, and so we are negatively impacting their overall health as well.

Funding from this bill will help assess individual needs and link people to the specific services that will serve them best. Some patients will need in depth treatment but others may be better able to care for themselves and need peer support. Right now, there is no working assessment pipeline which would save time, money, resources and lives.

Removing penalties for personal possession will alleviate fears that some people have in seeking help, and will reduce the unneeded strain on the carceral system and staff. Substance Use Disorder is a medical issue that is best handled by the medical community, and a partnership between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Maine Recovery Council is exactly that.

I hope for the sake of all Mainers that you consider supporting this health based approach and support LD1975

Thank you for your time, consideration and service to all of us,

Sarah Johnson
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