

Ashley Hebert
Waterville
LD 1975

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

My name is Ashley Hebert, and I am writing to express my strong support for LD 1975. Existing drug laws and criminalization practices directly contribute to the deterioration of health as well as spirit. We see this reflected in increasing drug overdoses, including overdose deaths, as well as the continued stigmatization of substance use. It seems archaic to enforce an abstinence-only or highly conditional type of public health and safety system when we have an abundance of research from people who use drugs which informs us that a people-centered, decriminalized approach is the only tenable, comprehensive way forward.

The reality is that the Maine Legislature allocates \$111 million annually to arrest, prosecute/defend, and incarcerate people, and many prison reform statistics reveal the disparities in quality of life across domains (housing, employment, health care) between people who have been incarcerated. A specific example of this is how people who have been incarcerated are 12.7 times more likely to overdose within the first two weeks of transition. We must reckon with the underlying reasons for these correlations instead of chipping away at viable solutions. I see these realities on a daily basis as a neighbor, organizer, and throughout various professional capacities (mental health, housing, education).

While we have a long way to go in terms of public health and prison reform, this bill, LD 1975, would remove penalties for the possession of scheduled drugs for personal use, which is a measure aiming to foster a health-oriented approach to drug use. This bill would also help to establish receiving centers in every county across the state, to be used for conducting health assessments, offering screenings for treatment, providing support for basic needs, and to be a vital link to harm reduction, recovery services, and supportive community. Finally, this bill would establish a dedicated fund to distribute grants and funding in order to broaden access to treatment and related services (including mental health, peer support, and harm reduction). Public health experts and peers alike acknowledge the significance of overlapping experiences among mental health and substance use peers, so it would be incredible to see this reality reflected in programming and funding. Both unfortunately see strained funding sources that jeopardize their success; for example, recovery community centers are grappling with \$50,000 annually, while additional mental health peer centers are closing or shrinking due to funding. All in all, this bill strives to save lives and promote a more holistic, choice-based public health approach that would benefit so many in our community.

In closing, I urge you to vote in favor of LD 1975 and contribute to a solution that will positively impact countless lives.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,
Ash Hebert
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