

Sharon Bailey
Jefferson
LD 1975
01/16/24

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

My name is Sharon Bailey. I live in Jefferson, and am a grieving mom. My only child and son, Matthew died on September 7, 2012 to an accidental heroin overdose. Since his death, I have become active in supporting others who grieve the loss loved ones due to overdose or substance use disorder(SUD). I am also an advocate for people in recovery or active addiction. By sharing Matthew's story, my hope is to fight stigma, help bring awareness to mental health and SUD, and to influence change. My passion is fueled by the need to bring honor and a voice to my son, and to all who have died or suffer from SUD in our state, because these lives, I feel, are considered meaningless by many.

Matthew suffered from mental health disorders and SUD since 8th grade. He had multiple hospitalizations, counseling services, intensive outpatient therapy, medication management, and case management services until his death at the age of 20 years. Treatment facilities for SUD were minimal prior to 2012 in Maine, which were the necessary services that he needed in order to have a chance in surviving his co-occurring disorder. Matthew deserved more.

On the night of his death, his fiancée (who also died from a heroin overdose less than 3 months later) was awakened to Matthew's struggling breathing sounds. She was able to arouse him enough so that he could speak. He told her that he thought that he was overdosing and to call 911. Before she could call, they had made phone calls to a couple of so-called friends (I found this out months later). Matthew and his fiancée decided that they would sit up for a while on the couch and watch TV, and declined to call 911. I believe that this call did not happen because they were afraid of being incarcerated for possession and use of heroin. Matthew had been incarcerated for a different minor offense and had told me that he would never go back to jail after he got out.

I wholeheartedly support LD 1975 so that people possessing small amounts of drugs for their use may never have to question or risk their lives in calling for help because they hold the fear of being incarcerated. LD 1975 will also provide vital services and support facilities for our communities to help promote successful recovery to individuals suffering from the disease of substance use disorder. I believe that this is the needed change that our state needs to address the drug and mental health crisis that is out of control. Our system is failing and LD 1975 is the vital shift in a different direction to help save and restore lives.

I urge you to vote in support of LD1975 to take the next step in saving the lives of our Maine people. Thank you for your attention!

Sincerely,
Sharon Bailey