



Committee on Health and Human Services

**LD 1975 - An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use  
and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs**

January 17, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Respected Members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Gia Drew. I am here as executive director of EqualityMaine, which has been representing and advocating for Maine’s LGBTQ+ community since 1984, and I am testifying today on behalf EqualityMaine in support of **LD 1975 - An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs**.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Substance Use Disorders (SUDs) are treatable, chronic diseases characterized by a problematic pattern of use of a substance or substances leading to impairments in health, social function, and control over substance use.”<sup>1</sup> We know that statistically, LGBTQ+ people face increased risks for mental health and substance use issues.<sup>2</sup> Ample research shows that these disorders are treatable and that people do recover when given proper, evidence-based care. However, there is currently only one 24/7 receiving center in the entire state, inadequate funding for many recovery community centers, insufficient for employing even one full-time employee, and over 10,000 overdoses in 2022 alone in Maine, including 716 deaths.<sup>3</sup> And yet, every year, state and local governments in Maine spend more than 100 million dollars criminalizing people who use drugs<sup>4</sup>. Our state is willing to regularly make a staggering financial investment by way of the incarceration and criminalization of people who use

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<sup>1</sup> “Substance Use Disorders (SUDs).” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 5 Oct. 2022, [www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/featured-topics/substance-use-disorders/index.html#:~:text=Substance%20Use%20Disorders%20\(SUDs\)%20are,and%20control%20over%20substance%20use](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/featured-topics/substance-use-disorders/index.html#:~:text=Substance%20Use%20Disorders%20(SUDs)%20are,and%20control%20over%20substance%20use). Accessed 16 Jan. 2024.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt41899/2022\\_LGB\\_Brief\\_Final\\_06\\_07\\_23.pdf](https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt41899/2022_LGB_Brief_Final_06_07_23.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [mainedrugdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022-12-ME\\_Monthly\\_OD\\_Report\\_final.pdf](https://mainedrugdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022-12-ME_Monthly_OD_Report_final.pdf). Accessed 16 Jan. 2024.

<sup>4</sup> “A Better Path for Maine: The Case for Decriminalizing Drugs.” *ACLU of Maine*, 16 Nov. 2023, [www.aclumaine.org/en/betterpathreport](https://www.aclumaine.org/en/betterpathreport). Accessed 16 Jan. 2024.

drugs – said another way, people who have a disease – when there is overwhelming consensus for a public health approach to address the needs of people with substance use disorder.

The consequences of the current carceral approach are dire: overdose deaths, criminal records that constitute insurmountable barriers to thriving, and limited care that does not sufficiently foster recovery. It is additionally important to note that for many people who use drugs, the stigma and discrimination toward individuals with substance use disorders is compounded by the prejudice already faced by marginalized communities, which places them at additional risk for a number of negative physical and mental health outcomes.<sup>5 6</sup> The current model is trying to treat a disease without the medical standards, financial investment, or compassion afforded to any other health problem.

The implementation of a robust public health response, while still maintaining legal consequences for activities such as manufacturing, selling, and trafficking will save lives, and will do so in an efficient, effective, compassionate manner. We urge you to support this bill, and to vote Ought To Pass on LD 1975.

Thank you,

Gia Drew

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<sup>5</sup> Krueger, Evan A, et al. "Sexual Orientation Disparities in Substance Use: Investigating Social Stress Mechanisms in a National Sample." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2020, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6925636/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6925636/). Accessed 16 Jan. 2024.

<sup>6</sup> "A Better Path for Maine: The Case for Decriminalizing Drugs." *ACLU of Maine*, 16 Nov. 2023, [www.aclumaine.org/en/betterpathreport](http://www.aclumaine.org/en/betterpathreport). Accessed 16 Jan. 2024.