

Jackson Peck  
Brewer, Maine  
LD 1975

## Testimony in Support of LD1975: A Crucial Step Towards Community Health and Well-being

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

I am here to express my strong support for LD1975, "An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs." I am a community organizer in the Brewer area, and in my work I witness firsthand the impact of substance use on our community, and I believe LD1975 is a vital step towards addressing this critical issue.

The problem at hand is clear and urgent. Mainers who use substances are facing significant barriers - often in the form of excessive criminal penalties - in accessing the care they need, resulting in devastating drug overdoses within our communities. The war on drugs has been waged for 50 years, and its impact has been clear. While we have made progress, there is still much work to be done, and it's clear that a fresh and innovative approach is needed.

Recent research reveals that approximately 17,000 Mainers actively seeking treatment for substance use disorders are unable to access it. The current situation is exacerbated by the limited availability of receiving centers, with only one 24/7 center in the entire state, and inadequate funding for recovery community centers. These centers play a crucial role in providing support and resources for individuals on their path to recovery. In my area, the Bangor Area Recovery Network (BARN) and Together Place Peer Run Recovery Center play a crucial role as a hub for those seeking community, recovery, food, housing, social services, and many other basic needs. These centers are on the frontline of the epidemic that the War on Drugs exacerbated, and the pharmaceutical companies fueled. Those who use substances, or those who simply possess small amounts of narcotics, are not criminals - they are victims of exploitation and over persecution.

LD1975 presents a comprehensive solution to this crisis by addressing the root causes of the problem. The establishment of a dedicated fund, in collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Maine Recovery Council, is a crucial aspect of this bill. This fund aims to distribute grants and funding to agencies, organizations, and service providers, enhancing access to substance use disorder treatment, mental health care, peer support, and harm reduction services.

Moreover, the bill proposes the establishment of receiving centers in every county across the state which would help reduce the burden imposed on service hubs such as Portland, Lewiston, and Bangor. These centers would conduct health needs assessments, offer screenings for substance use disorder treatment, provide essential support for basic needs, and act as a vital link to treatment, harm reduction, and recovery services. This decentralized approach ensures that individuals across the state have equal access to the support they need and don't need to travel to Bangor or Portland and live on the streets while seeking services.

I expect most others testifying to focus on perhaps the most important aspect of LD1975: the removal of penalties for the possession of small amounts of drugs for personal use. This measure aligns with a health-oriented response to drug use, prioritizing treatment over punishment while maintaining legal consequences for more severe activities. This is not an all out legalization, though I believe you'll hear a few people suggest, perhaps rightfully so, that we should consider that avenue. This is a stepping stone towards shifting our perception of those in need from criminals breaking social norms towards members of our community - Mainers - who are in desperate need of food, medicine, and other basic necessities.

The ultimate goal of LD1975 is clear: to save lives and help individuals reclaim their

lives through a holistic and compassionate public health approach. I urge each member of the Health and Human Services Committee to support this bill and contribute to the well-being of our community.

Thank you for your attention to this crucial matter. I look forward to witnessing the positive impact that LD1975 can have on the lives of many Mainers.

In Solidarity,

Jackson Peck

Brewer, Maine

[Jpeck@foodandmedicine.org](mailto:Jpeck@foodandmedicine.org)

(207) 355-4173