

Testimony in favor of LD 1975

January 17, 2024

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

My name is Suzanne Farley and I serve as the executive director of Wellspring, a non-profit agency that provides residential and outpatient co-occurring Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and Mental Health (MH) Treatment, including medically supervised withdrawal management services (Detox). Although located in Bangor, the agency provides services to people from across the State of Maine and our mission is to serve all people who need care, regardless of income. We are a Mainecare agency.

I am writing in support of LD 1975. For far too long, fully funding the continuum of care for treating SUD and Co-occurring MH has been largely unavailable. Due to the stigmatization of people with SUD, available funding for programs that offer care has largely been an after thought with no clear pathway for adding or improving services. This bill provides funding opportunities that would benefit new or established programs an opportunity to improve access to care and overall systems improvements that will lead to overall better public health outcomes across all social determinants of health. Additional funding opportunities enable treatment programs to adequately provide *whole person care* that metaphorically enables the whole world to open up because now there is adequate funding to wrap services around the individual that include their family, their support system, their other healthcare needs, including mental health, housing and transportation. This is true for anyone with limited means, but especially so for those individuals who are released from incarceration with untreated SUD. This bill includes funding to provide medication and counseling while incarcerated. This is so important because the data tells us that individuals are 12.7 times more likely to succumb to overdose within the first two weeks of their release. This is unacceptable.

Additionally, we are strongly in support of the development of more receiving centers. Meeting the needs in real time for individuals who come to our organization for help with their alcohol or substance use disorder can be difficult due to the lack of available open beds, or open calendar slots for appointments due to staffing shortages. Our residential wait list for an open bed averages four months. Wait times for appointments for an assessment can often be several weeks. Our detox center typically can admit only about a quarter of their daily calls for admission. Having a place like a receiving center that can immediately triage the needs of an individual is critically important from a public health perspective.

LD 1975 is so important because it offers the opportunity for people who use alcohol or drugs to receive essential services. When people get well it has a direct impact on their families and also for their communities. Wellspring believes that when people get well, they rebuild their lives and they thrive; their families thrive and our communities thrive. I urge you to vote in favor of LD 1975.

Thank you for your attention. I am available to address any questions you may have.

Sincerely,
Suzanne Farley
Executive Director
Wellspring
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