



## Testimony in Support of LD 1975

January 17, 2024

Good Morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Tess Parks, and I am a Policy Organizer with Maine Recovery Advocacy Project (ME-RAP), a bipartisan grassroots network dedicated to addressing substance use issues in Maine through community-driven and policy-based solutions. I am here today to testify in strong support of LD 1975.

Today you will hear of the various costs incurred from criminalizing substance use and from not having an adequate public health response for addressing Maine's addiction crisis. I want to talk to you today about a different problem that Maine is facing, one that is only going to get worse if we fail to prevent more substance-related deaths.

Economists have long warned us of Maine's workforce problem. Our workforce is not growing fast enough to keep up with the number of open jobs. According to a recent report from the Maine Center for Economic Policy<sup>1</sup>, "Over the past 20 years, the number of Mainers in the workforce has increased by just 6 percent, way below the national workforce growth of 20 percent." If we fail to maintain and grow our existing workforce, our economy will decline with smaller state tax revenues, and in rising costs for services. We have the oldest state in the nation and the costs of our elder healthcare system are only going to increase as more people retire.

What does this have to do with our addiction crisis? Overdose deaths are preventable. Every life saved with the help of addiction treatment services, is someone that may be able to remain in our workforce. Investing in addiction services today is an investment in Maine's long-term economic health. Even today criminalizing the possession of drug use is impacting our workforce and economy. In 2019 alone, those incarcerated for possession charges lost nearly \$8.8 million in potential wage earnings during pretrial and sentencing, which is equivalent to a \$808,633 in lost tax revenue for Maine<sup>2</sup>. Not to mention, it is harder to get a job when you have a criminal record.

Current and future economic losses have clear price tags. What does not have a price tag is the cost of losing someone you love. I can't tell you the number of funerals I have attended in the last 9 years since I entered recovery.

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<sup>1</sup> Myall, J. (2023). State of working maine 2023. Maine Center for Economic Policy.

<https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/State-of-Working-Maine-2023-Report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Tate, W., Sway, M., & Myall, J. (2022). A better path for Maine: The case for decriminalizing drugs. ACLU of Maine and the Maine Center for Economic Policy.

[https://www.aclumaine.org/sites/default/files/field\\_documents/a\\_better\\_path\\_for\\_maine\\_aclu\\_mecep\\_drug\\_decrim\\_report.pdf](https://www.aclumaine.org/sites/default/files/field_documents/a_better_path_for_maine_aclu_mecep_drug_decrim_report.pdf)



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Just this past weekend when I was working on this testimony, I got a call that my friend and captain of my softball team passed away from an accidental overdose. His two boys will grow up without their Dad.

I often think to myself that this disease is just not fair. In reality, what is not fair is that we spend an exorbitant amount of funding to charge people with possession when we could be investing those same resources into helping people get the care they need to stay alive. A public health response will mean fewer phone calls that our loved ones did not make it.

I urge this Committee to save lives and support LD 1975. I thank you for your time and would be happy to answer any questions.

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