

Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and respected members of the Health and Human Services Committee.

My name is Amy Clark, and I am a resident of Bangor, a recovery ally, and an affected other of the substance use crisis. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1975.

For close to seven years, I have spent my time volunteering in a wide variety of capacities to help support people in recovery, people who use drugs, justice impacted individuals, and their families. These years have provided me the opportunity for an up close and personal seat at witnessing both some incredible miracles and some of the hardest losses of my life. I've watched the light leave someone's eyes as they struggle to make it through just one more day, I've sat with parents and held their hands as they've sobbed over the loss of their child, and I've watched people leave the corrections system filled with hope only to be brought to their knees by a society not at all prepared or willing to support them. Next to raising my child, it's the most rewarding, and hardest work I've had the privilege of doing. And while I can't possibly adequately share in the 3 minutes I have here, to say that this work has changed me, and my world views would be a vast understatement.

I used to believe that addiction was a choice. Now I know better.

I used to believe that people could get help if they wanted it. Now I know better.

I used to believe that people suffering from substance use disorder were criminals who belonged in jail. Thank God, now I know better.

Now I know that addiction is a disease, and it requires a public health response. I know that jails are no place for substance use treatment, and I know that it is virtually impossible for people in the state of Maine to access treatment on demand when it is needed. Even here in Bangor where resources are considered "plentiful" compared to most places across the state, you are still looking at a multi month wait to access inpatient treatment. You have a greater chance of dying on the streets before getting the help you need. And yet every year, those of us doing the work, come before you begging for help. We are pleading for you to help our friends, neighbors, and family members. And we are expected to be happy with a handful of extra detox beds here or a smattering of new treatment spots there, all the while watching people we love die, faced with the grim reality that what we are doing just does NOT work.

Nothing changes if nothing changes. Continuing the status quo should no longer be an option for any of us. Because it doesn't matter anymore what we believe, it's about what we know. And what we KNOW is that we are losing this battle and every day someone else dies because of it.

This bill would treat substance use the way it needs to be treated, as a public health crisis. It would expand access to on demand treatment, greatly increasing the number of people with access to services, and improving the lives not only of them, but their friends, their families,

entire communities. Please do not continue the status quo, please join us in being brave and innovative and give people a fighting chance at recovery by voting yes on LD1975.

Amy B. Clark

Bangor resident