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THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

Testimony of Senator Richard Bennett
before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
LD 353, "An Act Concerning Substance Use Disorder, Treatment, Recovery, Prevention and Education"
January 24, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: I am Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford, and I have the honor of serving 14 communities in Western Maine in the State Senate. I am pleased to cosponsor LD 353, "An Act Concerning Substance Use Disorder, Treatment, Recovery, Prevention and Education"

As of November of last year there had been 559 fatal overdose deaths in Maine, which puts the average monthly number of deaths at 51. On top of that, there 8,576 nonfatal overdoses during this time period.

My home, Oxford County, tragically saw 15 deaths from overdose in 2020, 28 in 2021, 36 in 2022, and through 19 in November 2023. While this number is going in the right direction, our goal is zero. These dear souls are our neighbors, and they all have families and friends who miss them dearly and we must fight on in their memory.

We do know the best practices to prevent more overdoses. Still, we are losing hundreds of Mainers each year. We need to provide our neighbors with the tools and expertise they need to treat and beat substance use disorder. But in order to deliver those, we need to fully understand where and why we are falling short. This proposal will help us do just that.

I ask for your favorable consideration and thank you for your attention.