

January 31, 2024

Good morning Senator Baldacci and members of the HHS committee,

My name is Nicolette Centanni and I am licensed pharmacist who participates in the care of patients with substance use disorders in a hospital setting in Portland. I am here today on my own accord.

I grew up in a tiny community, Washington County, a place with the highest rate of opioid use in the State. My high school had 100 kids total in attendance and I would estimate at least 20 or more of them that were there when I have OUD. I also know at least 3 who have died of overdose from that group. I have seen the devastating downstream effects of lack of access to treatment for and criminalization of substance use. Growing up there was one small doctors office in town and the nearest pharmacy was 30 miles away. Maine and Washington County in particular suffer from higher than average rates of poverty. People with substance use disorder deserve medical and social care rather than being sent into the prison industrial complex where they are unlikely to have support from their communities. Incarceration leads to worse outcomes for the person in ways such increase likelihood of overdose, employment barriers when released and disrupting family structures.

For patients who use opioids, medications for opioid use disorder decrease the chance of death much more than cholesterol medications do for someone with stroke or aspirin does for someone with a heart attack. People need access to these medications that is ongoing and accessible. Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) have said in a joint report that **“enforcement ruins individual and family lives, discriminates against people of color, and undermines public health”**.

The US has the highest incarceration rate in the world which has increased 500% during the last 40 years mostly secondary to the war on drugs. If the U.S. prison industrial complex were a city, it would be in the top 10 most populous. We should not add to that people who actually need treatment for a chronic disease not to be isolated from society.

I urge members of the committee to fully support LD1975.

Thank you,

Nicolette Centanni