

February 27, 2024

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Baldacci and Representative Myer and esteemed members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Kandie Cleaves, I reside in Garland, and I am a mental health consumer. I am here today to testify **in favor of LD 2214 “An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024, and June 30, 2025”**.

For over 14 yrs. I have had the opportunity to be part of the Consumer Council System of Maine, we are the only organization of our kind in Maine that is mandated and funded into legislation to bring forward the voice of those who have lived with mental health issues to advice the legislature and state around appropriate services and delivery of services. The past couple of yrs. I feel like the Governor and the Office of Behavioral Health are finally hearing us. I am pleased that the budget has a strong focus on mental health. I appreciate the desire to have a robust rainy-day fund, however I feel we should utilize more of the funds towards services for those in need. Mental health services and housing issues (which also can be caused by or create mental health issues).

Last yr. I also felt heard by this legislature, LD 540 “An act to Establish Adult Mental Health Peer Respite Centers” made it here to the appropriations table. This year I hope that you will lift it off the table and fund it. Peer Respites have been effectively used in Maine in the past as well as utilized in other states. They have been shown to be effective in reducing the need for more costly services while helping those in need of them. Peer Respite is a more welcoming way to connect with those in need. People can connect with others who have experience with mental health issues which helps people feel more relaxed and willing to participate. Forced treatment on the other hand is more likely to keep people from being willing to reach out to get help when it is needed. I would also like to see the bills in the Maine Resiliency Package that has been presented today included in this budget. Added with LD 540 they make a well-rounded move to improving our current mental health system and towards being able to meet the needs of Maines mental health consumers. Around 1 in 4 Americans have a mental health issue, it is time that we stop looking at this issue from a lens tainted with stigma and start recognizing that those with mental health issues are your neighbors ,friends, colleagues, and so on, we do not need locked away , we simply need access to services just as you do when you seek other forms of wellness.

In closing I urge you to support LD 2214 with the additions noted.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kandie Cleaves

Garland