

Sarah Johnson
Sanford
LD 2237

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Testimony of Sarah Johnson in support of LD 2237, An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and Well-being by Expanding Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources

Presented by Speaker Talbot Ross

Before the Health and Human Services Committee: March 4, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sarah Johnson, I live in Sanford and I am writing in support of LD 2237, An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and Well-being by Expanding Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources.

There are many aspects of this bill that will help meet immediate needs for Mainers in crisis situations.

Funding for expansion of the mobile crisis system and inclusion of peer support specialists as co-responders to crisis situations will have an immediate positive impact in harm reduction and result in de-escalating these events. Well trained peer support specialists are critical members on crisis teams, as well as in public education.

Along with the mobile crisis response services, this bill will expand much needed crisis receiving centers throughout Maine. To be effective these centers should also be staffed with peer support specialists and focus on the diverse needs of the surrounding community. Community involvement is needed in the development of these centers, especially for families with loved ones in crisis. Understanding the challenges these families have endured will help develop a more successful system for all of us.

Medication management and the availability of telehealth services would help DHHS in their need to become compliant with the Consent Decree standards created in 2021. Our current system has people waiting up to 18 months for an appointment with a prescriber which is shameful, and fuels crisis situations.

This bill is needed to treat healthcare issues as healthcare issues, and keep those in need out of our prison and jail systems. Currently jail budgets are stretched by unfunded mandates for programs like MAT. Jail staff members are not trained as medical professionals or peer support specialists, yet we put this responsibility on them every day. This negatively impacts their health and takes resources from other educational and personal programming that should be their focus.

Maine needs more medical and behavioral health facilities and services. We have thousands of citizens that we know of seeking treatment without access to it, and those in crisis rarely have access to a 24/7 center in our geographically vast state. I believe the outcome of this bill will be greatly reducing violent and critical incidents in Maine, as well as reduce our prison and jail populations.

I hope you will support this bill that promotes health and well being for all Mainers. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Johnson
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