

March 4, 2024

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

My name is Victoria Mcarty. I am a resident of Augusta. I am writing today to testify in favor of **LD 2237: An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and We by Expanding Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources**. This bill is very critical to me and my immediate family since they utilize behavioral health services, and everyone is at risk of encountering some form of violence in such uncertain times.

I unequivocally support LD 2237's focus on mobile crisis teams, receiving centers and medication management. The same goes for safety issues through creating an office of Violence Prevention Resource Services. Strengthening these services as presented in this bill will make them much more accessible to many, including people experiencing homelessness.

On mobile crisis teams and receiving centers there should be a significant number of peer support specialists as co-responders with clinicians. This is how Spurwink's receiving center is set up. Also, these receiving centers should have immediate access to whatever a person might need in the way of services such as but not limited to all MaineCare, behavioral health and/or SUD and BRAP/Continuum of Care services. Peer Support Services are a proven evidenced based model that is backed up by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA).

Commenting on the need for strengthening our medication management programs, there must be a mechanism that would allow individuals to have a choice of how they communicate connect with their med management provider. Several days ago, an individual told me that even though he had told his provider many times that utilizing zoom for appointments was very difficult for him. The provider sent him an email the morning of his appointment saying they weren't going to be able to be in the office and would be seeing clients via zoom. The individual did not see the email in time since he had to travel a distance from his home to the appointment. So, he was unable to keep the appointment and the earliest he would be able to see his provider would be two months out from that day. I am sure this is happening to other peers as well. Also workforce development is a key component to making sure that there are enough providers since there are still too many people waiting to access this very necessary service.

Several legislatively created initiatives have advised on how to fix the system, one of the more recent was the **Mental Health Working Group** which came out of LD 1602 in 2019. <https://www.maine.gov/mentalhealthworkgroup/home> but at the present time our mental health system is still a siloed mess. For years, Maine has been seeing the same people moving through the mental health system, substance use disorder system, our criminal justice system, and our homeless system. Weaving access and supports throughout these systems will help to ensure that fewer people will fall through what

little safety net is currently available. This in turn will save all our systems money. And most importantly it will go a long way to improving the quality of the lives of each person.

In closing, I strongly request that you vote "Ought to pass" on LD 2237.

Thank you for all the hard work you do and your diligent consideration of LD 2237

Sincerely,
Victoria R. McCarty