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Hermon  
LD 514

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Dear Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

I am writing you today in support of LD-514 A Resolve to Raise Mainecare Reimbursement Rates for Detoxification Services. I apologize in advance for not attending in person but I am out of state for the public hearing and this is a very important issue for me and the hundreds of people seeking treatment and recovery from substance use disorders in Maine.

My name is Pat Kimball and I am retired now after working in the field of substance use disorders for over 30 years. I started in this field as a counselor (LADC, CCS) and the last 10 years of my working was that of the Executive Director of Wellspring an agency located in Bangor which has residential programs, outpatient services, transitional apartments, and a detoxification program. I have spent my retirement working with my community to ensure that prevention, treatment, recovery, and harm reduction services are available to those in need.

Detoxification involves going through withdrawal, it includes providing patients with the medical supervision, assistance and support they need to overcome withdrawal. A detox program involves handling withdrawal and caring for the body until the drug is completely out of the system and withdrawal is finished. It is a medical process that takes trained physicians, nurses, and other professional health care providers as well as medication to manage the withdrawal. When you have someone in need of detox they are extremely sick with chills, fever, sweats, cramping, diarrhea, vomiting, just to name a few. They are so physically ill they are not in a place to make life changing decision such as going to work, being able to parent a child or deciding what the next step in treatment is. They need medical care and once they get that care we can talk and help them with their next steps to recovery. And people do recover, in one study it states we have 30.5 million people living a life in recovery, many started with a detox protocol.

Before I retired Maine had few detox beds available, they were mostly in southern Maine or not in this state. We had no capacity for medically caring for these individuals and they detoxed in unsafe places such as the streets, unsafe building, homeless shelters, jails, park benches and emergency rooms. What happened in most cases was they went back to using, as it was the only thing they knew to stop the physical pain. It was a horrible way to treat someone wanting to seek services for their substance use disorder. They needed medical care that they could easily access but what they got was hours and days on the phone looking for a bed.

Then about 6 years ago the Governor, her team and the legislature recognize the need to have more detox beds available statewide. The last bill I worked on with the help on many legislators before retirement was to help secure detox beds for the Bangor Area. That facility is now open but struggles daily financially because of low reimbursement rates.

We have an opiate epidemic which far too many people are dying from and although we are making progress, we still have a long way to go. No one should have to die; no family member should have to endure the pain of this loss. We as a county and as a state need to build a continuum of care for individuals who need treatment and recovery which includes detoxification. We believed that if we could medically detox people in a safe environment, we then could refer them to the appropriate level of care and lives would be saved. And I believe we are doing this in Maine, but we have a problem and that is keeping detox centers open, not from lack of work but from inadequately reimbursing them for the service. They are operating at a loss and they

can not sustain this for long.

All the funds you invested in the detox beds were an excellent investment but it is not enough. What we need is the rate of reimbursement to keep up with inflation and the rising costs of hiring appropriate licensed medical staff to manage a detox. I fully realize that this is a tuff year financially for families, the state, and our nation but this is not I believe where you want to cut corners. Investment in detox is in investment in treatment which leads to recovery which leads to families being together, a larger work force and more people living healthy productive lives. This is an investment in people.

Please consider this bill as I believe increasing these rates will keep programs operating and lead to more lives saved. If you have any question, please contact me I would be more than happy to share my expertise and thoughts. Thank you for all you are doing for us in Maine.

Pat Kimball, Recovery Advocate