

Merideth Norris
Kennebunk
LD 514

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Esteemed Members of the Health and Human Services Committee.

My name is Dr. Merideth Norris. I am a registered voter in Kennebunk. I am board certified in addiction medicine and have been involved in recovery advocacy in Maine for over 15 years. I am speaking in support of LD 514, which proposes increased reimbursement for withdrawal management, or detox facilities.

Many people believe that inadequate funding of an organization means simply that we tighten our belts. Maybe we have fewer hours of phone coverage, or stop doing pizza day for the staff. Maybe they turn down the thermostat a bit.

The reality is that when organizations are underfunded, it creates limited access to treatment or forces closure. This can have deadly consequences for our citizens that are already at high risk.

Part of my work with ME-RAP has involved daily posting of available detox beds for Mainers. I assure you, we have enough beds to meet the demand for detox services. However, some beds remain open and cannot be filled because there are not enough staff to safely provide service if every bed were occupied. This is largely due to inadequate funding.

I was the medical director of Spectrum Health, a clinic which provided methadone treatment in the city of Sanford, Maine. It was a great joy watching people bloom while in our care, getting back to work, being effective parents, staying out of contact with law enforcement. They were healthier and more productive citizens, which is what all of us hope to see.

In the summer of 2015, however, after reimbursement for this treatment was cut in half, we had to close our doors, leaving over 100 clients without access to our services. Within 6 months, 7 of those clients had died of overdose. If inadequate MaineCare reimbursements force the closure of any of our detox providers, I fear that we will see more deaths. 514 can help prevent that from happening.

Social media posts involving recovery, harm reduction and treatment are always rife with troll commentary about “what they need is jail time!” and “the solution is stop the fentanyl coming in!” We all would like to limit the presence of lethal substances in our community but when we look at the data, supply side drug policy has never been effective on its own. It was not during Prohibition in the 1920’s, and it is not working now. We can be most effective when we focus on decreasing the demand for lethal substances by increasing access to recovery services.

For every dollar spent on treatment for substance use disorder, the state saves at least \$12 in downstream costs due to medical and legal consequences. Sustainable access to detox facilities does not just make good moral sense, it is good economics. Thank you for your time and attention. I hope you will support LD 514. I am happy to answer any questions.