

March 28, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and Honorable Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

I am here today to testify in opposition to **LD 1024; An Act to Expand the List of Crimes That Do Not Qualify for Immunity Under Maine's Good Samaritan Laws.**

My name is Catherine Ryder, and I reside in Windham, Maine. I am the mother of an adult child who died from an overdose, and I am a career behavioral health professional, currently serving as the Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives at Spurwink Services. I am here to voice my opposition to **LD 1024**, which aims to weaken the protection of Maine's Expanded Good Samaritan Law by adding new crimes to the list of offenses that can be charged at the scene of an overdose.

During the 130th Legislative Session, Maine made significant progress in saving lives when Governor Janet Mills signed LD 1862, the Good Samaritan Bill, into law. This legislation was crafted with the clear intent to prioritize the health and safety of Mainers over punitive measures, ensuring that individuals feel secure in calling for emergency assistance during an overdose. Since its enactment, this law has been recognized as one of the strongest Good Samaritan Laws in the nation.

The importance of maintaining robust protection under this law cannot be overstated. While overdose deaths have recently begun to decline, with Maine noting a 16.1% reduction in 2024, we must not reverse this progress by discouraging people from seeking life-saving help. LD 1024 threatens to undermine these protections by expanding the list of crimes that can be charged at the scene of an overdose. The risk is evident: if more individuals are afraid to call 911, more Mainers will die needlessly from preventable overdoses.

Having dedicated four decades of my career to the field of behavioral health, I can confidently state that some of the most impactful work I have done involves supporting individuals struggling with addiction. Addiction is a brain disease, and the stigma and shame surrounding it often stem from misconceptions that those with substance use disorders are weak, immoral, or simply seeking a good time at society's expense. Recognizing that addiction significantly impairs brain dysfunction can help reduce this stigma. Moreover, understanding the specific types of brain dysfunction can guide us toward effective interventions and prevention strategies. For instance, during adolescence, the brain is highly plastic and vulnerable, making this a critical period for caution and intervention. The earlier the exposure to drugs or brain trauma, the greater the potential damage.

When we hear about overdoses, it is often in the form of numbers. We hear the numbers, sigh with sadness, and then go on with our busy lives. Today, I respectfully invite you to join Spurwink on Saturday, April 12th at The Pathway Vineyard Church in Lewiston, as we stand witness to a silent memorial of more than eight hundred lives lost to addiction. This silent memorial known as **The Black Poster Project** is deeply impactful and helps us remember what we are fighting for. I promise that when you walk in and stand witness to the hundreds of beautiful faces and narratives on display, you will better understand the pain of those who have

been brought to their knees watching their loved one struggle with addiction...and ultimately lose their battle. We must continue putting faces and names to the numbers, and we must continue to find ways to crush stigma and bring people into the light.

On a personal note, I too have lost a beloved. My only son, a combat veteran, lost his life to a fentanyl overdose on December 21, 2021, just four days before Christmas on the winter solstice. Two of my dearest friends and colleagues, also executive leaders in our Lewiston community, also lost their sons, one a year before me, and one a year after. This disease knows no boundaries and we must do everything in our power to keep the pathways to recovery clear. Each life-saving intervention is another day for that person to contemplate a new journey.

In conclusion, I urge the committee to reject LD 1024. The Good Samaritan Law was enacted to encourage people to seek medical assistance without fear of prosecution and we must safeguard this progress and ensure that every person in Maine feels safe calling 911 in an emergency.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Catherine R. Ryder". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and contact information.

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