

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Louise Wotton and I live in Lewiston. I am writing to testify in support of LD 1425, An Act to Improve Access to Sustainable and Low-barrier Trauma Recovery Services.

October 25, 2023, is a day I will never forget. It was life changing.

My husband and I were at the bowling alley as part of the Apple Valley Bowling League. It was only our second night so although we knew a few people from Apple Valley golf course, there were many people at the bowling alley we did not know. We had been bowling for about 20 minutes, having a good time, when all hell broke loose. We heard a loud pop and looked over towards the front. We were near the back door, so we did not see the shooter. Several of us thought it was some sort of balloon popping; then we heard more shots. Someone yelled "RUN," and everyone started running and pushing towards the back door. Outside, everyone was running in different directions; it was chaos. We didn't know if the shooter was behind us. We were all terrified and couldn't believe what was happening. People were frantically looking for their families and friends. It was chaos and this continued throughout the night. We finally got home around 12:30 a.m.

Within a few days I heard that the Maine Resiliency Center (MRC) would be opening to help the victims and those experiencing trauma from the mass shooting. Although I thought this was a great idea, I did not think I needed counseling. After all, neither my husband nor I were injured and most of our friends made it out alive, although we did lose a member of our league. My life had changed, however. For months following the shooting, I isolated myself, except for work and groceries, but I was still afraid at both places. My husband and I didn't go out to restaurants or the movies. I didn't feel safe anywhere.

In January of 2024, I noticed that the MRC was offering separate group sessions—one for adults at the bowling alley, one for children at the bowling alley, one for those at Schmengees, one for those who lost a loved one, and more. I've never been to group therapy before, but this interested me. After isolating for 2+ months, I needed to reconnect with the bowling league community, so I went to the first group session. It was a game changer. Finally, I was able to share my feelings and fears with others who not only understood me, but who shared the same feelings and fears. I felt validated. I wasn't alone. My husband didn't go with me that first night but after I came home and he heard about my experience, he went with me the next week. We've been going ever since.

In the time I've been going to the MRC, I not only reconnected with members of the bowling league, but I also met parents and kids who were at the bowling alley, spouses who lost their husbands, survivors from Schmengees, and families of victims. Our experiences may have been different, but we all shared a common bond—surviving a mass shooting. We are all like family now.

I've since gone back to the bowling alley, but this would not have been possible without the support from the advocates of the MRC. They were there to support us during the soft opening and again when we rejoined the bowling league. At the Center, the advocates opened their arms and their hearts to help us heal. They listened to us, cried

with us, hugged us, and supported us in any way they could. They taught us skills to help us control our fears and anxiety. They organized community events to help us reintegrate into society in a way that we felt safe.

The MRC is a much-needed resource in this community. There is so much violence and tragedy in the world today that people need the services the MRC provides just to survive. I would urge you to vote for LD 1425 to keep the MRC open and to improve access to ALL people who have experienced trauma. The MRC has truly been a blessing for me and the community.

If I can answer any questions for you, please do not hesitate to reach out. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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