

May 7, 2025

Testimony in Support of LD 1425:

An Act to Improve Access to Sustainable and Low-Barrier Trauma Recovery Services

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Meredith Stack and I live in Windham. I am the Maine Resiliency Center's Program Manager. I am here to testify in support of LD 1425, An Act to Improve Access to Sustainable and Low-barrier Trauma Recovery Services.

As a lifelong Mainer, I grew up understanding the value of neighbors helping neighbors through difficult times. But some wounds run deeper than what a neighborly hand can heal alone. Events, like 10/25, don't just harm individual people—they shred the very fabric of our community and tear away our collective sense of safety and security. When violence strikes in places we once considered safe—our schools, grocery stores, places of worship, bowling alleys, restaurants and bars—it fundamentally alters how we move through our daily lives and relate to one another.

I've worked in community-based mental health services throughout Maine, witnessing countless individuals struggling with the aftermath of traumatic violence and the added pain of our overburdened systems' failures. Too often, I've seen people turned away because they were underinsured or didn't "qualify" under rigid service criteria.

I've sat with parents who witnessed car accidents that claimed their children's lives, their grief compounded by waiting lists for services. I've talked with convenience store clerks who stared down the barrel of a gun during robberies, yet couldn't access trauma-specific care because they weren't physically injured. Our system routinely fails when people need it most.

At the MRC, we've witnessed firsthand the complex journey of trauma recovery. I've seen community members arrive at our doors in shock, grieving, angry, and confused. I've watched as those who once couldn't leave their homes gradually take small steps toward reengaging with their communities—returning to work, playing in leagues again, or simply shopping at the local grocery store without fear. I've also sat with those who, months and months later are just now ready to seek support. Healing isn't linear, and proper support meets people wherever they are in their process.

The proposed bill would address a critical gap in Maine's trauma response. Victims of mass violence carry wounds that require specialized care, yet they often face overwhelming barriers to accessing appropriate services. Similarly, our first responders—those who rush toward danger while others flee—bear silent burdens from the traumatic scenes they witness, frequently without adequate supports in place, over and over and over again.

Just as important, but often overlooked, are the allied professionals who form vital support networks around trauma survivors. Through our work, we've supported sign language interpreters who translate horrific accounts of violence for Deaf community members, victim advocates who support survivors through grueling legal processes and graphic recounts of their experiences, and local healthcare providers who absorb countless traumatic stories day after day.

By supporting these allied professionals, we create a ripple effect of healing that extends far beyond individual survivors. When first responders, interpreters, advocates, and local providers

receive the support they need, they can continue their essential work without becoming casualties themselves, ultimately serving more community members with greater effectiveness and sustainability.

Words of sympathy and acknowledgment are important, but actions speak louder than words. This bill is your opportunity to transform empathy into tangible support for those who have endured the unimaginable – your constituents. This isn't merely about allocating resources—it's about declaring that in our state, no one should face trauma's aftermath alone.

In Maine, we value self-reliance, but we also understand that true strength comes from knowing when to reach out for help. This center would provide space for those who have experienced unimaginable trauma, offering services without the red tape of arbitrary requirements.

The resilience I've observed in trauma survivors is remarkable, but recovery cannot depend on extraordinary personal strength alone. The MRC has created a community of healing honoring our Maine values of self-reliance and our commitment to supporting one another through life's darkest moments.

Beyond the profound human impact, early intervention in trauma care represents a significant cost-saving measure for our state. When trauma goes untreated, the downstream effects cascade throughout our healthcare system, criminal justice system, workforce, and families. Each dollar invested in timely trauma services saves an estimated seven to ten dollars in future healthcare costs, lost productivity, social services, and public safety expenses. I've watched community members who received prompt support return to work, maintain family stability, and avoid costly hospitalizations—while those who couldn't access services often cycled through emergency rooms, inpatient units, and sometimes even our criminal justice system. The economic argument for trauma services is as compelling as the humanitarian one.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote for LD 1425. I'm happy to answer questions if you have any.