

May 12, 2025

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Victoria McCarty, and I am a resident of Augusta and a person with the lived experience of mental health challenges. I am writing in strong support of LD **1866, “An Act to Amend the Laws Regarding the State-designated Agency Advocating for Individuals with Serious Mental Illness”**.

Individuals with serious mental health challenges are among the most vulnerable citizens. We face significant barriers to accessing quality care, protecting our rights, and navigating complex systems-whether living in the community or hospitalized. Disability Rights Maine has a community advocates program that continues to benefit both individuals with serious mental health challenges and those who provide mental health services. This program covers the entire state of Maine. Currently though, advocacy services have no statutory guarantee that individuals with serious mental health challenges will have access to independent, effective advocacy.

Passage of LD 1866 would do the following:

- Requires the Department of Health and Human Services to contract with an independent agency to provide at least six full-time advocates for individuals with serious mental health challenges, both in the community and in hospitals.
- Ensures that advocates can:
  - Receive and investigate complaints regarding rights violations and timely access to services.
  - Pursue legal and administrative remedies when needed.
  - Monitor the quality of care and report findings to the Legislature, the Department, and the public.
  - Serve as a statewide information source on rights and relevant laws.
- Provides statutory access for the advocacy agency to medical records, with strong confidentiality protections.
- The bill explicitly defers to federal law (42 U.S.C. Chapter 114) where conflicts arise, ensuring compliance with national standards for mental health advocacy.

This bill is most important because independent advocacy is essential to protect the rights, dignity, and well-being of those of us who experience serious mental health challenges. And, by establishing these services in statute, Maine will ensure that advocacy is not subject to budget fluctuations or administrative changes.

And above all, this bill will help prevent abuse, neglect, and rights violations, and improve access to needed mental health services.

Finally, LD 1866 is a bipartisan, common-sense step to protect some of Mae's most vulnerable residents. I urge you to support this bill with an **"Ought to Pass"** vote and ensure that those of us with serious mental health challenges have the advocacy and protection they deserve.

Thank you for your attention and your commitment to mental health in Maine.

Sincerely,

Victoria McCarty

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