



Testimony in Favor of LD 178

March 13th, 2023

Kwe'(greetings) Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and other honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee of Criminal Justice and public safety,

My name is Steven Knockwood. I am the Deputy Organizing Director for the Maine Recovery Advocacy Project, a person who has lived life experience as an incarcerated member of the marginalized Indigenous community of Maine and a resident of Augusta. I am here today to testify in favor of LD 178: An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community.

I am Muin Clan, Mi'kmaq First Nation and a person in recovery from Intergenerational Trauma, Residential School Trauma and Physical and Cultural Genocide. I say this because it is important to understand how factors that are uncontrollable to an individual can influence a person's ability to make decisions that can alter their life forever.

The Department of Corrections houses many indigenous individuals who are just like me. These individuals were born into a world in which Intra-Generational violence was normalized, Substance use rates are far above the general population, physical and sexual violence has been normalized. These individuals and many others deserve an avenue of recourse.

From a Policy standpoint, we are at a critical point in the fight against the criminalization and incarceration of people who have Substance Use Disorder and Mental Illness. The solution to this harmful practice is a Public Health response to these issues. LD 178 is in my eyes a necessary step in this process. It will reduce spending in the budget that could then be redirected towards the supports and services that are vital to success for all people dealing with these disorders and individuals reintegrating into our communities from incarceration. It would reduce the harm we as a society have unjustly done to individuals like myself that are still serving long sentences that were imposed because of symptoms of an underlying disease.

Please join with me and support LD 178, bring an opportunity to reunite my brothers and sisters with their family and communities. Bring our vision of a public health response to substance use and co-occurring disorders one step closer to reality.

Nitap(thank you)

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