

Chairperson Baldacci, Chairperson Meyer, other distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is John Nutting from Leeds, and I'm here in strong support of LD 455. I want to thank Senator Baldacci for bringing this bill forward and its assurance that we have this very important discussion.

In 2002, as a member of the Maine Senate, I was the prime sponsor of the progressive treatment plan bill (PTP) and I have served on the Riverview Hospital human rights committee for the last eight years. Maine has previously applied for the IMD waiver for substance abuse and for severe mental illness. It was approved for both by the federal government, but Maine chose only to accept funds for substance abuse. I have read in multiple papers that the reason given was "that the mental health funds had to be used for building hospital beds, and Maine had an adequate number currently"! I will leave it up to others to debate hospital bed numbers. The point I want to make is that Illinois, Washington DC, Vermont, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Utah, Idaho, Rhode Island, and Washington have all received IMD waiver monies for serious mental illness, and used a good percentage of them to strengthen their COMMUNITY mental health support systems! They have enhanced their mobile crisis response units, their peer supports, their community based services and their housing services. I do know that these are all things that Maine desperately needs to improve on in order to keep more people suffering from severe and persistent mental illness safely supported in a less restrictive setting in the community.

Departments getting inaccurate or bad advice is nothing new, but the department not checking on this while three New England states already are benefiting from stronger community supports is extremely disappointing. Of course, if other states can, so can Maine.

In 2016, President Obama signed the "21st Century Cures Act"; part of that bipartisan federal act established a grant program for assertive community treatment teams (ACT) - no state match required. Millions of dollars have gone to states for this funding over the last six years so that more people with "Anosignosia" could be intensely and safely supported in the community on PTP programs rather than on a "cross your fingers" program. The state of Maine has never applied!

Both of these issues beg the question, why isn't the state of Maine applying for all readily available sources of federal monies to strengthen our mental health system, both in a hospital and a community setting? The public and the press that is here today have been asking these questions for months and months and cannot even get a call back! We are all hoping that you the members of this committee today, and in the work session on LD 455, can get this question answered.

Thank you. I'd be happy to answer any questions.