

Mitch Degere  
58 maple wood Lane  
Durham, ME 04222

## Testimony in Opposition of LD445

Dear Senator Balducci and honorable members of the joint standing committee on health and human services. My name is Mitch Degere, I am a resident of Durham ME and I am here today to testify in opposition against LD 445. I work as an Intentional Peer Support Specialist and co-facilitate a group that I initiated at my employment called "alternatives to suicide" (Alt2S) and have begun to initiate a group for moms that have had children taken by the state. My peers and I are creating a newspaper, the first edition to be published May 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **Intentional Peer Support is about Community and Social change**

In 1990 my exhilaration to be in Ireland, seemed indescribable as my cab drove me down O'Connell Street through the center of Dublin. As my observations were keen, the grayness, and some sadness sunk in watching poor children chalk drawing on the sidewalk for coins. I stated to my driver " I hear the job market is bad right now. "BAD! He says, I'll tell you how bad it is! Just the other day my mate Patrick was crossing the lively river bridge, for he had seen this poor sole of a man jump in. Patrick, being the brave man that he is, jumps in after your man. Our poor soul yelling out don't save me! don't save me! Patrick, taken by surprise, my god man I didn't jump in to save ya, I want to find out where ya work."

In this experience is the human condition, people struggling to survive, little children hungry, the shame of poverty, Patrick taking advantage of another person's pain, and the fact that it took me two weeks to realize the cabby had pulled over to tell me this ditty, thus charging me for the story.

### **Invest money and resources directly into the Community**

At the age of five a gentle small, rugged hand grabbed the inside of my arm and startled me. When I looked up, I relaxed. "Oh, it's just smiler". I was raped repeatedly by an elderly neighbor, we called "smiler" a trauma that remained silent for 25 years and created the inability to protect myself when I was abducted at the age of 14, which also remained hidden. "Most abuse is friendly fire"

I lived with a loving family; Mom, Dad, two sisters and two brothers. Our neighborhood should have been in a Norman Rockwell painting. A 10- room farmhouse that was always breaking down, loading coal, carrying water from the well when the pump was down, rock and apple fights, countless adventures and every once and awhile a call to my mother, Mrs. Degere your boys are naked on the roof again. The home with love, but saturated with alcoholism and periods of dysfunction, some violence. My siblings and I LOVED IT!

### **Families are in desperate need of help in dealing with their collective trouble**

Between 1991 and 1996 I went from being in a psychiatric ward (three times/each for six weeks) and several stays in day treatment to working as a mental health worker the at Austen Riggs Center for three

years. A psychiatric treatment center with seriously mentally ill patients that have a history of treatment resistance. It is an “open setting”, the freedom to come and go which puts the initiation and commitment of the treatment along with personal safety, where it belongs, “in their own hands”

**Involuntary Hospitalization should be very rare. Because forced treatment doesn't work as well**

In freedom we experience anxiety, fear, shame, isolation. All us humans must manage our freedom throughout our lives, developing our own sense of security. This development begins when we have no control over our lives as infants/toddlers and young children.

My personal experiences, research, and education brings me to the conclusion the task for us today is to oppose this Bill which will only continue to fuel inefficiency, instead let's bridge the emphatic gap between the powers that be and the people they are serving. This is backed by expert research from the APA shown through Meta-analysis that support for mental health into the community will influence the reduction in need of psychiatric beds.

Recently, there are many states trying to make it easier for “involuntary” psychiatric bed admissions for inpatient and outpatient treatment. Please refrain from this, the cost is too high, and it feeds into the root causes that contribute to mental illness: humiliation, shame, and isolation.

**Dignity needs to be “imbedded” in the treatment of the mental health system.**