

DISABILITY RIGHTS MAINE

April 5, 2023

Senator Joseph Baldacci, Chair
Representative Michele Meyer, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Cross Office Building, Room 209
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 540 An Act to Establish Peer Respite Centers for Adults with Mental Health

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Jane Moore and I am a mental health advocate with Disability Rights Maine, Maine's designated protection and advocacy agency for people with disabilities. As an advocate I have worked at Riverview Psychiatric Center (RPC) and am currently working as a mental health advocate in the community mostly in York and Cumberland County. I am also a peer and worked as a Certified Intentional Peer Support Specialist at RPC. Disability Rights Maine testifies today in support of LD 540 "An Act to Establish Peer Respite Centers for Adults with Mental Health Challenges in Maine".

According to the National Empowerment Center 14 states currently offer peer respite including Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont.¹ Peer respite provides a voluntary, low barrier alternative to traditional crisis services such as emergency departments and crisis stabilization residences. It can be a unique additional resource along the continuum of mental health care already offered in Maine.

New peer respite programs are emerging every day throughout the country and the research that has been undertaken shows evidence of their effectiveness in reducing costs and frequency of

¹ <https://power2u.org/directory-of-peer-respites/>

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hospitalizations among those utilizing the centers.² A study conducted in California found that peer respite guests at the Second Story program were 70% less likely to use the emergency department or hospital inpatient services as well as a decreased reliance on coercive treatment.³ Second Story was the first peer respite program to open in the country and it was funded by a SAMHSA Mental Health Transformation Grant.

SAMHSA cites the cost effectiveness of peer-run crisis respite but also points to the more important qualitative outcomes including the restoration of hope and empowerment in a less traumatizing, strength-based setting.⁴ In addition the focus at peer respite programs is not the traditional focus on what is wrong with you, but on building strength to move forward towards your goals.

Because of the success of peer respite, its cost effectiveness and the impact it can have to enhance the lives of people with psychiatric labels, Disability Rights Maine urges you to vote ought to pass.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Jane A. Moore, JD
Advocate
Disability Rights Maine

² Bouchery, Ellen f. et al" The Effectiveness of Peer-staffed Crisis Respite Program as an Alternative to Hospitalization." *Psychiatric Services* 69:10 (oct.2018): 1069-1074.

³ Encompass Community Services, "Second Story" Accessed Jan.13, 2021.

⁴ SAMHSA Peer-run respites: An effective Crisis Alternative"