

Good Afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is April Kerr, I am a resident of Farmington and I am testifying in support of LD 540 “An Act to Establish Peer Respite Services for Adults with Mental Health Challenges in Maine.”

I am a person who has had lived experience of mental health struggles for decades. For the past 6+ years, I have been in recovery, and I am working toward a healthier me every day.

The battles I faced were traumatizing and often caused one thing to lead to another. “It’s a vicious cycle”, is not just a saying. There were times when I felt so trapped, not because I couldn’t go somewhere due to transportation or money or because someone was telling me that I couldn’t. It was more about not knowing where to go once I left home. I struggled with a major depressive disorder and deeply hidden fear and anxiety mostly because of a battle with agoraphobia. I didn’t know what I was struggling with but I knew what I was feeling and thinking. Why did I always seem to wait until it was dark out to go to the store or any other kinds of things outside of the home that I needed or wanted to do? Why did I go to the store and sit in the parking lot for 20, 30, or even 40 minutes before finally going inside to buy what I needed? I would sit there and go over what I had for money, my list, and so on. Then I would think, do I really need to go in today? Can I wait until tomorrow or later in the week to get these things? I would often turn around and go home without even getting out of my car.

I knew there was something wrong but I didn’t know what. I was in counseling and saw a psychiatrist sometimes when I would go, and when I had an appointment. The help was minimal at best. If I could just go somewhere and rest, get away from the, (stuff) that I was surrounded by for a day or so... but where would I go? To a friend’s? That would mean that I would have to deal with their questions and “stuff” in their life/home. That’s not going to work. You see when someone is in a mode of needing help and not knowing where to go or what they need for help, trusting people or wanting to deal with more stuff on top of their own is just too much. You are left with your own despair and uselessness, in a dark and weary place. You

feel like no one could understand or much less care. This is one of those places that can lead to self-medicating with alcohol and/or drugs, overeating, etc. If I had only had the chance to go to a place where someone could have sat with me and helped me process what my needs were and how I could work on getting them met I may not have done many of the things I did to get through the moment. I might even have had the chance to spend the night in a safe and judgmental drama-free space, oh Hallelujah!!

I know that much of what I have explained here today may not seem like too much but believe me it was and if not for the grace of God I would not be here today! People are suffering in silence right now, today. They are in their homes or on the street or in an Emergency dept. Waiting to be seen, and will they be seen? Will they be heard? Will they be sent home with a pill bottle or sent to a psychiatric hospital to wander the halls wondering if they did the right thing by even going to the hospital? Are they going to pay with a label for the rest of their life? Should they have just stayed home and shut the door on the world? Does it matter? Does anybody care? This is how many people think and feel during these times of desperation and they/we need somewhere to turn, somewhere to help them turn around their life, get a healthy reset, if only for a brief moment in time. Please help us get this tool in place to help get the direction needed. Please, please vote ought to pass.

Sincerely, April Kerr

Farmington