

April 5, 2023

Good Afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Ash Hebert, I am a resident of Waterville, and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 540.

I approach this testimony with not only evidence but also as someone who has been subjected to crisis services multiple times in my life. LD 540 would establish two adult peer respite centers across the state in areas that report the highest concentrations of crisis service utilization. And while that may sound or feel far-fetched, research reveals that peer support respite programs in New York, California, and Georgia have witnessed an overall reduction in hospitalization rates, duration of stay, costs; and decreased reliance on more coercive forms of treatment. Peer respite models encourage a more humanizing safety net for people who are experiencing crisis by allowing free movement, choice in support options (wellness walks, peer support groups, art/music, cooking, mindfulness), and access to a peer-comprised staff during initial intake and throughout one's stay. Respite is based in a trauma-sensitive, home-like, and voluntary setting (Mad in America, 2021). Evidence therefore shows that peer respites provide an awesome alternative to hospitalization for individuals like me who experience mental health crises from time to time (LAPPA, 2021).

Likewise, LD 540 is a bill to celebrate, and it aligns beautifully with the principles and goals of the AMHI Consent Decree of 1990, such as: decreased reliance on institutionalization, a redistribution of funding to the community, providing least restrictive available treatment settings and means, and service delivery based on individualized needs. To be honest with you all, sometimes I experience scary bouts of crisis and while I wish more than anything that I could confide in the current medical system the State offers to relieve some of that suffering, I have had far too many traumatic and forced experiences to ever return voluntarily. That is a major shame and I recognize it is a shared experience for many other peers. This, however, can begin to change with your influence. In closing, I urge you to pass LD 540.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ash Hebert

Waterville Constituent

Resources

[Peer Respite as an Alternative to Hospitalization \(legislativeanalysis.org\)](http://legislativeanalysis.org)

[TABLE OF CONTENTS \(maine.gov\)](http://maine.gov)

[Evidence for Peer Support May 2019.pdf \(mhanational.org\)](http://mhanational.org)