

April 5, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and Honorable Members of the Health and Human Services Committee.

My name is Kandie Cleaves, and I reside in Garland. I am here to testify in favor of, **LD 540 “An Act to Establish Peer Respite Centers for Adults with Mental Health Challenges in Maine.”**

While I haven't been to a Peer Respite personally it is easy for me to see how it can be effective, from my other experiences.

I raised daughters who required special needs services. Because of this I had occasional opportunities to have respite services, that allowed their dad and I to have a short break while the kids were with safely cared for. This time was to relax, get extra sleep or do something fun. It made a huge difference when I returned home. That type of respite served its purpose well. Had I had an opportunity to go somewhere without my then husband or the kids, where I could talk with Peers who could relate to the many things, I was dealing with emotionally it could have cut years off the time I spent in counselling.

For some of us finding or maintaining healthy friendships with people we can spend time with can already be challenging, add in mental health issues that are overwhelming your life and it often makes the challenge impossible. For years my in-person circle consisted of my medical team, individuals assigned from church to visit, my husband's friends and an older neighbor couple. I was only able to connect with others at that time via mail or a pay phone. I was unaware of peers I could share and relate with. People, including family don't often want to be around someone who wants to talk of the mental health struggles they are dealing with, it's depressing. I became disconnected from most of the family I was raised with for this reason.

There were many times in my life years ago where I should have received more intense treatment, but I avoided my providers during those times since I had no one who could step in and provide care for my children if I were away. Their dad was not an appropriate option.

At those times going out of my home became impossible. I recall one incident where I watched the mailman leave a letter in my box across the road. I desperately wanted that letter that I knew my mom had sent, but could only stand at the window and cry, knowing it would be a few more hours before my girls got home from school and would bring in the mail. At that time I was dutifully taking my meds and seeing a counselor at my home once a week. But I needed more than 45 minutes a week to talk. A mental health hospital would have been more than I needed, but a Peer Respite where I could have talked to people who could relate, an where arrangements would have been made for my kids, so I didn't have to worry about their safety or about the state coming to get them, would have been a perfect option, and one that would have saved thousands of dollars and could have allowed me to remain capable of working at that point in life.

In closing I hope that you can see the benefits as well and will vote in favor of passing LD 540.

Thank you,

Kandie Cleaves

Garland