

April 5, 2023

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

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

I wasn't sure where to start I just kept drawing blanks, I thought back to more recent traumatic experiences, thought a bit too deeply about a woman I saw abducted and how my pleas to the authorities were not taken seriously, just as my own had not been heard when I sought help for myself. This created a mini-PTSD experience so instead I just decided to type what comes to mind.

I could list off many times in my life where I could have used a respite care center especially as a young single mother who had experienced much trauma from an early age and throughout life. I am now in a better place in life than I was for many years, but I write this in hopes that this gets approved and that those who can utilize these respite centers will not have to take as long as I did to get to a better place in life and for those who may falter on their path and just need a brief reset to resume their recovery. We live in a time where we are all connected yet never have so many people felt so alone. These centers will give people the opportunity to be with others who have a common purpose and are more likely to understand one another. It will help them to feel less alone, be less isolated and feel less judged. It offers a peer setting rather than a clinical setting. I can attest that going inpatient for mental health can often be more harmful, I felt unheard, judged and ashamed and the staff and doctors are unrelatable, and the setting is cold, it feels more like being a criminal than a patient. It would be good and vital to have a place where people can go who know that they need a respite before reaching a mental breakdown and not have to turn in their shoelaces. With their peers they can talk and feel understood and greatly relieve the stress putting them there. They can share resources, strategies and coping skills with one another. But mostly they can offer each other needed companionship and compassion.

We have very little options if any to help give people a needed respite that aren't the extreme. We need more options and this is one that is proven to help, so please help by passing LD 540.

Thank you for taking time to hear my thoughts.

Krystal Gustin

Bangor