

Testimony in opposition to LD 986

Good morning Senator Pinny Beebe-Center, Representative Suzanne Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee.

My name is Winifred Tate, I am a resident of Waterville, an associate professor at Colby College, and director of the Maine Drug Policy Lab at Colby College. We are researching the history and impact of drug policies in local communities, and the experiences of people who use drugs and in recovery in Maine.

I am here to testify in opposition to LD 986.

I believe, although I have not spoken with the sponsor of this bill, that this bill comes from a set of values that we share: we recognize the devastating toll of fentanyl in our communities, and we want to end the tragedy of overdose death.

Research and experience demonstrates that increasing criminalization, increasing sentencing and lowering arrest thresholds, is not the way.

This law would allow the state to sentence people with substance use disorder to 30 years in prison for drug trafficking, even if they have no intention of selling drugs. Even if they don't know that their drugs contained fentanyl. Because they have a medical disease called substance use disorder.

Fentanyl is part of a global system of drug production and sales that cannot be stopped by targeting those who sell it in Maine.

Attempting to do so will cause more harm, to our communities, at tremendous financial costs to our communities.

There are many numbers that lay out the financial costs of prison. One of the lowest that I have found was produced in the Maine Adult Drug Treatment Court Evaluation Report, published in December 2020 by the Public Consulting Group, a day in prison costs \$123, \$44,895 a year. To keep someone in prison for 30 years costs \$1,346,850.

We need that money for treatment, for pathways to recovery, and for harm reduction approaches that will prevent overdose death before it happens.

We have a clear consensus around the need for a public health approach to address the needs of people with substance use disorder. Law enforcement, prosecutors, the governor all say: we cannot arrest our way out of this. It is time to make ensure our policies center and support a public health approach.

Instead of moving backwards to failed approaches from the past, Maine needs to move forward toward with public health approaches to address the devastating consequences of problematic substance use.