



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

Drew Gattine

529 Stroudwater Street
Westbrook, ME 04092
Home: (207) 409-3477

Drew.Gattine@legislature.maine.gov

May 8, 2023

Testimony of Representative Drew Gattine Presenting
LD 1781, An Act to Establish the Homeless Substance Use Disorder Service Program

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and my distinguished colleagues on the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Drew Gattine and I am honored to represent parts of Saco, Scarborough and Westbrook in the Maine House. I am pleased to appear before you today to present **LD 1781, An Act to Establish the Homeless Substance Use Disorder Service Program**.

I'm here today to tell you a success story. A success story that this committee was a big part of and a success that we can build on this session.

People with substance use disorder (SUD) who are experiencing homelessness have unique challenges in accessing services and are particularly susceptible to overdose and death. A recent survey led by the University of Colorado, in coordination with the National Health Care for the Homeless Council (NHCHC), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the CDC Foundation, demonstrates through modeling a 151% increase in overdose mortality; 11% reduction in life expectancy; 50% increase in hospitalizations; and a 38% decrease in Medication for Opiate Use Disorder (MOUD) initiations.

Traditional case management systems are unsuitable for homeless individuals experiencing acute symptoms of SUD. More intensive, low-barrier approaches are needed. Housing is a critical component of substance use disorder treatment, as the trauma of homelessness complicates people's ability to engage in treatment and can trigger substance misuse and relapse.

Recognizing this, the 129th Legislature, based on a recommendation from this committee, unanimously passed LD 1337, creating within the Department of Health and Human Services a pilot project called the Homeless Opioid Users Service Engagement (HOUSE) Project. The purpose of the project was to bring together low barrier treatment, housing and case management for people experiencing homelessness who have substance use disorder. The project launched in 2021. Two vendors were selected for the pilot, Greater Portland Health (collaborating with Preble Street) and York County Community Action Corporation.

Following me you will hear testimony about how successful this pilot program has been. The Greater Portland Health/Preble Street collaboration has served 49 people, connecting 100% of participants to Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) and Mental/Medical Health Treatment, and housing 27 individuals. Combined, the 27 individuals housed have experienced over 273 years of homelessness. Participants have spent 8,179 nights in stable housing, an amount equal to 22 years.

You will hear testimony today from people who participated in this program and the life-changing impact it has had on their lives. You will also hear from the providers who will tell you why this program has been so successful and how the lessons learned from the pilot can be used to improve the program going forward.

The bill before you today continues this program and builds on its success. I urge you to continue to support it.

I am happy to answer questions.

Thank you.