



January 17, 2024

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, Representative Javner, and Respected Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Brian Townsend, and I am the Executive Director of Commonspace, known until last year as Amistad, and I am here to ask you to support LD1975, as it is legislation that I am certain will save and transform lives and strengthen communities throughout the state of Maine.

Commonspace operates Recovery Community Centers in Lincoln County (Newcastle) and Sagadahoc County (Bath), as well as a Community Center in Portland that welcomes adults impacted by mental health issues and co-occurring substance use challenges. We also operate harm reduction programming across our service area, inclusive of our Syringe Service Program in Portland, and we run four recovery-centered housing programs in the Greater Portland area. Community-based, peer-to-peer recovery support is our area of focus and expertise.

I am additionally speaking to you and endorsing LD1975 as a person who grew up in the Boothbay Region, in a family of fisherman. I experienced the effects of drugs and alcohol on my family, and on my friends and neighbors throughout the town, region, and industry.

LD1975 will provide the investment in recovery resources that we have needed to meet the complex and pervasive issue of substance use disorders across our communities. This legislation is also needed to remove the needless, harmful, and retrograde criminalization of addiction. I've seen the worst of what drugs can do to a person and to a community. I've also seen the impact of arrests, criminal records and periods of incarceration on people who were in dire need of addiction treatment, human connection, and encouragement but instead suffered isolation, stigma, and significant barriers to meaningful community integration.

Thankfully I have also had the great fortune to witness people seizing available supports and resources along personally charted paths of recovery. We all know that this path can begin anywhere, and as community caretakers it is our responsibility to make the trailheads as visible and as welcoming as possible. LD1975 will do just that, and it will announce to the communities in this state, and beyond, that Maine is serious about removing the grip of substance use disorders on our friends, family, and neighbors. It will announce that we will no longer pretend that our jails and prisons are treatment centers, and that we will not criminalize disease. It will offer hope, something our communities desperately need.

Thank you for listening, and please do support this incredibly important piece of legislation. I am available if I can offer more detailed views on LD1975 or answer any related questions.

Sincerely,

Brian Townsend

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