



Pinny Beebe-Center
Senator, District 12

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

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Augusta, Maine 04333

***Testimony in Favor of LD 1975:
An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and
Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs***

January 17th, 2024

Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. I am Senator Pinny Beebe-Center, and I represent Senate District 12, which makes up 12 communities in Knox County. I am here today to support LD 1975, An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs.

This bill would help make sure that no matter where you live in Maine, if you have a substance use disorder, you can get the help you need. It would also make an important change in our state's criminal drug laws, by removing penalties for drug possession of small amounts of drugs for personal use, and leaving all laws related to selling, furnishing, or trafficking in place.

I am currently the Senate Chair of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee (CJPS). When I was a Representative, I served one term on CJPS. I came to that committee with much community experience in dealing with people who were addicted and those in recovery. I have served as the Regional Director for Penquis Community Action Program- during which I started the Knox County Homeless Coalition. As a Community Consultant, I also worked with the Knox County Free Clinic to increase access to mental health counseling and addiction recovery. As a consultant I have helped organize many efforts for families and children which have galvanized the Knox County community to help families and children deal with poverty, mental health, addiction, and reentry from incarceration.

My hope for entering the Maine Legislature was to pass legislation that would make our families safer, identify and provide resources for people with behavioral health needs and enable our communities to commit to the wellbeing of its people. Every year, we hear bills in our committees that try to help and support people who use drugs. But no matter how many laws we've passed in committees addressing drug use, we haven't gotten our hands around this issue, and our constituents are still hurting. We have failed to pass most of those bills and when we have- the fiscal note causes it not to be funded.

That is why I am excited to be before your committee, the Health and Human Services Committee, to discuss how to address problematic substance use. This public health issue is best addressed with a public health response. We are undergoing an epidemic tied to experiences such as trauma and abuse, poverty, and compounded by lack of access to a wide range of community services, as well as by our ongoing and failed attempts to arrest and penalize our way out of the crisis. This bill takes a different approach. It was written within a harm reduction framework to move our drug laws towards something that works, towards laws that help end our overdose death crisis, keep families healthy and together, and redirect our limited public resources towards more effective uses.

Some people want to point to our jails and prisons as “safe, controlled” environments that allow people to come off drugs and get connected to services. But the reality is that when we lock people up and force them to detox on their own without medical supervision, we are not helping them find a healthy way out of drug use. Not only is forced detox excruciatingly painful and cruel, it is dangerous: it creates an artificial environment where people might be abstinent briefly, but quickly start using again when they are released into their community with the same pressures, traumas and temptations that they faced pre-incarceration -- but with the addition of a criminal record, a period of disconnection away from family and community, and a decreased tolerance. As a result, when they are released, they are ten times more likely than the general public to overdose.

Evidence shows that connection with others and being part of a community are the most important factors for giving people the stability they need to find sustained recovery. LD 1975 allows people to create connections, stay in touch with their loved ones, and receive the care and help they need in their own communities, instead of alone, in jail, with little medical help.

It is time to treat drug use for the health issue that it is. LD 1975 does that. I urge you to support this bill.

Sincerely,

Senator [Pinny Beebe-Center](#)