



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002  
(207) 287-1400  
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

## **Raegan LaRochelle**

102 Hemlock Terrace

Augusta, ME 04330

Phone: (207) 624-2668

[Raegan.LaRochelle@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:Raegan.LaRochelle@legislature.maine.gov)

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*Testimony of Rep. Raegan LaRochelle in support of*  
**LD 1975, An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the**  
**Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs**  
*before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services*

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Raegan LaRochelle and I represent House District 59, part of Augusta. I am here today to speak in favor of **LD 1975, An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs.**

Today I am testifying on behalf of my life partner Fred, who suffered from substance use disorder for over 25 years. Looking at his younger years, no one would be surprised: from his mother's suicide when we were in high school to his father's alcoholism, depression and cancer that killed his father when Fred was in his early 20's, Fred lost his support system early and traumatically. He did start college but went to prison for drugs at 19 years old.

Throughout his life, Fred spent over seven years incarcerated because of drug possession and use. He dealt with arrests, court dates, plea deals, lawyer fees and probation. However, absolutely none of that stress, embarrassment or punishment cured him from his substance use disorder. Instead, it unnecessarily complicated his life, put him in debt, kept him away from his children and labeled him a felon multiple times over.

Fred passed away 59 days ago from a drug overdose. He was 46 years old. Over the past two months, I have thought a lot about what could have helped to make the outcome different for my best friend. Fred had a family who loved him, a comfortable home, his own business, access to health care and a solid recovery community. What I have concluded is that Fred simply ran out of time. What I mean by this is that Fred did not seek any type of treatment or rehabilitation until he was almost 40. So I cannot help but wonder where he would be if, instead of being uselessly incarcerated for seven years, Fred had received treatment and support for those seven years. If that had been his reality, I would like to think he would be here testifying himself today.

There are literally thousands of people like Fred in our state. From my experience, people with substance use disorder (particularly men) can be some of the most sensitive, traumatized and heartfelt people in our society. For decades, we have attempted to use punishment and shame as a deterrent for people who use

drugs. Today, I hope that this committee will take the lead in ending the horrible stigma and finally treat substance use disorder as a disease, not a crime. Thank you.