

## LD 1975 - Testimony

Good Morning Esteemed members of the one hundred and thirty-first legislature.

My name is Shelley Randall. I am a registered voter of Boothbay, Maine. I am here today in support of LD 1975 that establishes receiving centers for those with active substance use disorder to access services to address the numerous issues that confront those with SUD.

I have been sober for 34 years and worked with individuals in and out of recovery from addiction for 32 years in a variety of capacities. I have worked as a counselor in a methadone clinic and a halfway house for those convicted of drug offenses.

I was a child protective lawyer for 25 years in Massachusetts and New Hampshire defending parents whose children were being removed from them for substance use disorder, poverty and mental health issues. I was a Guardian ad Litem representing the children's best interests in these tragic situations and I represented the New Hampshire Division for Children Youth and Families for 10 years, prosecuting abuse and neglect cases.

I am well aware of the complex issues that face the states and their families as they grapple with these issues.

Throughout these years I watched as the Opioid Crisis burgeoned and I saw the impact it had on families and children and how the state services were and continue to be ill equipped to manage the fallout from this massive challenge.

Parents routinely are arrested and jailed for their use of substances leaving the state and/or relatives to provide care for the children whose lives have already been severely impacted by their parents' substance abuse. The foster care system and child protective services are overburdened leaving children at risk for further neglect. Law enforcement is overburdened. Jails are filled with parents whose substance use disorder led to poor choices, poverty and the neglect of themselves and their children. In jail, they are not provided adequate treatment to address their substance use disorder and/or mental health challenges.

The federal government allows for parents who have lost temporary custody of their children to the state 12 months to correct the conditions that led to the children's removal. If the parent is released from jail before 12 months is up they are at a severe disadvantage in working on the case plan for the return of their children. If they are released after 12 months they have de facto lost their children to an adoptive home. These children suffer.

Criminalizing drug use creates distrust among those using substances and law enforcement and child protective workers, resulting in the individuals less likely to reach out for help for themselves and/or their children. They live in fear and secrecy compounding the culture of distrust and teaching their children to fear authority. This in turn makes the job of the child protective worker that much more challenging. The kids won't tell their teachers or the school nurse what's going on in their home much less a "State worker". The kids are taught not to ask for help when they are struggling.

LD 1975 would go a long way in creating more trusting relationships within the community - Law enforcement, child protection and our friends, sons, daughters, mothers and fathers using substances. We all know of someone in our lives consumed by and alienated by and ashamed of their use of substances.

The centers may involve members of the community to help those folks that are suffering, humanizing the challenges of substance use disorder and mental health difficulties, creating understanding and helping relationships.

I cannot help but think of the Lewiston shooting whereby the shooter targeted members of his own community.

The time is now to build stronger healthier relationships within our communities to help each other. These are challenging times - this bill would go far in addressing the isolation, the fear and anger among our community members that have such tragic results.

LD 1975 is part of this effort and I urge the members of this legislative session to pass this bill.