

*Testimony from Ashley TCM, B.A. Sociology/Psychology, in Support of LD 1975, "An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs."*

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Ashley Sabine. I live in Lewiston, and I'm here today to speak in favor of LD 1975.

One week from this day will be 13 years since I lost my partner to drug overdose. He was 21 years old when he passed away. He never did learn how to swim, or drive. We never got to dance at our wedding, live together, or grow old side-by-side. He never got the chance to meet his daughter and now she will grow up without her father. It was all cut short because of his struggles with drugs.

As a young adult I watched my childhood friend become addicted to heroin. I watched as she slowly became consumed by addiction, watched her lose weight, lose her children, lose herself. I also got to watch her fight back against addiction, watch her struggle to maintain sobriety, watch her become healthy again, get her kids back and work to rebuild her relationship as their mother.

Addiction is a disease that has been destroying the lives of Maine's families for many years. The drug of choice may have changed, but the effects remain the same. People who use drugs are not without value because of their struggles and should not be labeled as criminals. Addicts are partners, parents, sons and daughters; they are people who are suffering, and they deserve the chance to recover. Statistics have shown time and time again that recovery doesn't happen by imprisoning users, but rather by offering a treatment-based approach. Opioids have been a growing epidemic in Maine for many years, yet we are still failing to address the issue.

I currently work as a case manager in a transitional living program for homeless teens and young adults, and in the past two years I have known at least 2 young adults who have lost their lives in substance related instances. When I go outside in my neighborhood, I can see the growing need for treatment as more people fall into poverty and turn to drugs to self-medicate and escape the harshness of their reality. The need for resources to address this crisis is growing as losing young people to overdoses is becoming commonplace. It's a very bleak reality that won't be solved unless we take steps to change it.

Voting to pass LD 1975 would be a good step in addressing the ever-growing addiction crisis in Maine. It would help get treatment to those who need it by supporting the long-term solution of a recovery focused approach to substance use, rather than continuing to contribute to the overcrowding of prisons and cycles of poverty/entrapment.

I urge you all to vote to pass this bill. Vote to protect our most vulnerable. Vote to give people a chance to recover from addiction. Vote to stop cycles of poverty. Most importantly though, vote because you know that on a fundamental level all life is valuable, and all people are deserving of care and compassion. Addicts are people, and addiction is a disease that deserves treatment.