

1/17/2024

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

My name is Katherine, a single mother from Newcastle, and as someone who has a past with Substance Use Disorder and *fought* to get myself help, I believe LD 1975 could have helped me get easier access to what I knew I needed but had no way to navigate on my own. I also I believe it could have saved my sister's life. I am here to share a bit of my story - and my older sister's as well.

Being someone who grew up in a home with easy access to alcohol, I was drinking and blacking out as a teenager - I was and am a binge drinker. My family was already dealing with my sister's addiction issues, but back in the '90s, no one really knew what to do for help. *I knew I did not belong in jail* - I knew right from wrong - but my mental health was such a confusing mess. I was so ashamed of all the things I did, and therefore kept drinking to be numb and forget, also known as the "vicious cycle."

Last spring, I ended up in our local ER one night after drinking and being close to alcohol poisoning (which was a frequent thing in my life). I left the ER the next morning - with no help, just a list of numbers and a "good luck" on my way out the door. As soon as I got home, I frantically called the numbers and got passed around which got me nowhere. I reached out to our local community navigator who needed me to sign a waiver at our local YMCA to receive help. I was not able to do that in the condition I was in.

I decided that same afternoon my only option this time was to get drunk again and go to detox in Pen Bay in Rockport. That changed my life. I got my meds situated and on the list for rehab in Limestone. I spent two weeks in detox and went home - slipped once - got arrested for violating bail conditions from my OUI in March 2023. Seeing the "endangering the welfare of a child" charge the next morning made me sick. *I did not belong in jail, I needed help.*

I "white knuckled" it until the day I went to a 28-day rehab - I was not a bad mother. As someone who was put down frequently and called a "total loss," judged at my work and community for being in the police reports, the depression got too much to even fight for help until I knew I couldn't live like that anymore. In my head I knew I was not this person that everyone else saw. With support from my then-boyfriend, who watched my son while I was in rehab, I was able to push through and go without worrying about my son. Sometimes it only takes one person to say you can do this.

My older sister, Jackie, unfortunately didn't have the same opportunity that I did; she overdosed in February of 2016 on fentanyl which was unheard of at the time. This was shortly after she was released from jail. My parents found her and I wouldn't wish that on anyone. If she had the option for help or jail, she would have chosen help. *She did not belong in jail - she needed help.* After rehab, I moved back to my home and was looking to restart and reset my life. With no license, finding a job was a challenge. I wasn't even able to work at Walmart because of my background check. Because of really lucky timing, I came to an open house for a newly opened recovery center down the road from me which had a position open.

Today I am a recovery coach in Lincoln County and I am here to fight again for all those who do not belong in jail but instead, need help. I truly believe that LD1975 can save lives.

Sincerely,  
Katherine Lizotte, Newcastle, 207-315-1259