



Testimony in Support of LD 1975

January 17th, 2024

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for having me. My name is Jon Reynolds. I am an organizer with Maine Recovery Advocacy Project (ME-RAP). I am here today to testify in favor of L.D 1975, "An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use. This bill is important to me for many reasons.

As a person who is now in long term recovery, I am also a person who has been criminalized for my substance use and mental health disorders. I say I am now in long term recovery because for many years I was a part of the ever-revolving door of the criminal justice system. For many years that is how society handled my mental health disorders. I was diagnosed with severe anxiety and PTSD in 2004 when I was just 13, and my Dad had passed away. The medications that the doctors prescribed were heavily addictive and when they decided to take me off them abruptly, I was now left with a substance use disorder (SUD) and untreated mental health disorders.

I have never considered myself a criminal, nor mean or abrasive person. I feel as though the system treated me that way when I was arrested for possessing a medication that I needed to help relieve my anxiety. I spent many years in and out of various county jails in the state of Maine when I was just trying to alleviate the symptoms of my mental health disorders. In these jails I felt that society saw me differently and that I was unwanted by the general public.

When I was released, I would intentionally avoid people so I wouldn't be a burden. But somehow, some way I always found myself in a jail cell when I was just trying to escape my pain. That was the only solution they had for me. Incarcerationalways perpetuated more pain, suffering, and destruction in my life. As well as in the lives of my family and loved ones. L.D 1975 seeks to take a different approach towards the 13-year-old boy who is struggling with mental health issues, and it takes a different approach at how society treats people who are just trying to escape their pain.

So, when I say I am NOW a person in long term recovery, I say that because as of January 29th, 2022, I have found long term recovery. I found it through the love and support of my community. Not only have I abstained from using substances since then, I have also built an incredible life that I don't need to escape from. I am healing with and through my community and friends.



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I know that many people are still suffering today but I know in my heart that if L.D 1975 is passed, so many more people can have the freedom I have today. Not just freedom from prosecution of my substance use disorder but freedom in my own mind. L.D 1975 is about healing and support. Without either, I wouldn't be able to stand here today and talk to you wonderful folks about the amazing life I have now. Thank you very much for your time. I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Jon Reynolds
ME-RAP Organizer