



Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine

The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive Director

Testimony in Support of LD 1975

"An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs"

Sponsored by Representative Crafts

January 17, 2024

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Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committees. My name is Charlotte Warren, and I am here on behalf of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. The Alliance is the statewide association representing the majority of Maine's community-based mental health and substance use treatment providers, providing services to over 80,000 Maine men, women, and children. The Alliance advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system.

On behalf of the Alliance, I am here today to speak in support of LD 1975, "An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs." This bill is focused on -- first and foremost -- saving lives. Secondly, the proposal utilizes a public health response to substance use disorder. Further the proposal creates the behavioral health resources required to help suffering Mainers get their lives back.

The proposal before you, through its creation of a dedicated fund of resources, aims to establish a dedicated fund, to enhance access to evidence-based substance use disorder treatment and related services, including mental health care, peer support, and harm reduction. Again, these are evidence-based services that provide results, and we need more of them. Access remains a large issue -- all these existing services have long wait lists.

Additionally, the bill proposes the establishment of receiving centers in every county across the state. These centers would conduct health needs assessments, offer screenings for substance use disorder treatment, provide essential support for basic needs, and act as a vital link to treatment, harm reduction, and recovery services including mental health support.

Finally, LD 1975 removes penalties for the possession of small amounts of scheduled drugs for personal use because substance use disorder should be approached as a health issue rather than a criminal one. SUD is a complex medical condition with biological, psychological, and social components. Treating individuals grappling with substance abuse through a health-oriented lens emphasizes compassion, understanding, and evidence-based interventions. On the other hand, criminalizing SUD perpetuates a cycle of shame and stigma, hindering individuals from seeking help.

Shifting towards a health-focused approach allows for evidence-based practices that address the root causes of substance use disorder. By viewing SUD through a medical lens, we can promote a more effective and humane response, fostering recovery and reducing the social and economic costs associated with punitive measures.