

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Patricia Kidder and I am a resident of Springvale, part of the city of Sanford. I am writing you today (January 17th, 2024) to testify in favor of LD 1975: An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs.

I am a long time member and volunteer of the Maine People's Alliance (MPA) and the Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network (MUUSAN), a faith based social justice organization. Even though I am writing to you personally, I know that MPA, with more than 32,000 members across our state, and my UU Faith is supporting me 100% on this issue.

We all know someone with Substance Use Disorder (SUD) or are suffering with it ourselves. We know that SUD can happen to anyone. It doesn't discriminate who it infects. We know that it is a tough medical condition to treat and that it can and usually does take many tries before attaining a sustainable recovery.

My friends on MAT or Medication Assisted Treatment who can't take suboxone and need Methadone instead, have to drive an hour to the clinic to get their medication. There's so many obstacles and hurdles on anyone's journey to a sustainable recovery that we should do whatever we can to make it easier and give them a higher success rate.

Substance Use Disorder is truly a medical condition or disease and we need to treat it as such. SUD is just one of the many manifestations of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and the people who suffer with it need access to many ongoing forms of treatment to sustain long term recovery. It has been shown that peer support and communities are very important components of their long term treatment plan. No one will ever understand more about what someone goes through with SUD, than somebody else who has Substance Use Disorder and is on their Recovery Journey. These relationships are crucial for a successful long term recovery for many suffering with SUD.

These essential nonclinical peer to peer services are available through Recovery Community Centers across Maine. They have shown to help people maintain their long term recovery, improve their quality of life, the lives of the people who love them and the communities where they live. We currently have 19 Recovery Community Centers or RCCs in Maine but many

have minimal funding and can't provide the essential services required for successful long term recovery. A quarter of our RCCs received less than 20% of the funds predicted to be needed to operate fully for one year. Presently there is only **ONE** Receiving Center that is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and one more in the works, but that isn't enough. Every county in Maine needs at least one 24/7 Recovery Receiving Center. Presently there's around 17,000 Mainers who want to enter into a recovery program but can't access it because of lack of services and the inability to pay for their needed care.

A criminal response to the health care crisis SUD sufferers face, isn't helping to curb opioid use. It only makes it harder for someone to have a sustainable recovery. We don't put cancer patients in jail or blame them if their cancer returns after treatment, why do we blame (and shame) the SUD sufferer when they have a relapse. Giving an SUD sufferer a criminal record makes it nearly impossible to put their lives back together when they are ready to seek recovery services. They have a much harder time getting a living wage job and a nice safe place to live. The depression this causes contributes to the return to drug use and the high overdose death rates shortly after incarceration. This kills people and unnecessarily ruins lives of the people who love them. We must address drug use (OCD-SUD) with a public health response, if we want to save lives and we do want to save lives, correct?

Our friends, family members, and neighbors need all of Maine's Recovery Community Centers to be fully functioning to support our loved ones with SUD. Our communities and state need the centers to provide peer to peer support for all who seek it to sustain their long term recovery. The only way to make this happen is to find an ongoing funding source that can keep up with the high cost of the much needed centers. LD 1975, the Substance Use, Health, Recovery and Safety Act will accomplish that goal.

Allocating excise and sales taxes from the adult use cannabis tax revenue every year would provide some of the ongoing funding required to make all of our Recovery Community Centers fully functioning and able to expand into more rural communities. Requiring the State to transfer the amount of money saved from switching from incarceration to a public health response will really help a lot to fund the much needed 24/7 Recovery Receiving Centers in every county. This bill will not take any funds from the Adult Use Cannabis Public Health and Safety and Municipal Opt-In Fund, which pays for prevention efforts and law enforcement education. LD 1975 takes advantage of the relatively new state revenue source, adult use

cannabis tax, by setting it aside to provide the ongoing funding needed for our RCCs to fully function and open a 24/7 Recovery Receiving Center in every county in Maine.

We know it is going to take more action to get our current SUD epidemic under control and that it has been decades in the making. We know it will take easy access to low-barrier housing and recovery services first to start someone's recovery journey and the peer to peer recovery services provided through our Recovery Community Centers is crucial for their long term recovery. And we know the positive ripple effect a loved ones long term recovery has on themselves and everyone around them for generations to come. RCCs may be only one of our tools that we can use to combat the SUD epidemic but it is one of the best ways we know really works to help people sustain their long term recovery.

You have the power to really make a difference in the lives of people suffering with Substance Use Disorder and the people who love them. You have the power to provide ongoing funding for a state wide program that has shown its effectiveness in assisting SUD sufferers by supporting their long term recovery. It is only by supporting people's long term recovery efforts that we can **reduce** the number of relapses and therefore **reduce the overdose death rates**. **You have the power to save people's lives and dramatically improve the lives of all of us.** I am asking you to please vote in support of LD 1975: The Substance Use, Health, Recovery and Safety Act and help us fight back against the SUD epidemic that has spread across our entire state and effects every one of us.

Thank you for your time and your service.

Sincerely,

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