



HHS/SUD Services Budget Testimony

February 27, 2024

Good Afternoon Members of the Appropriations Committee and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Courtney Gary-Allen, representing the Maine Recovery Advocacy Project (ME-RAP) and serving as an At-Large City Councilor in Augusta, along with co-vice chair of the Maine Recovery Council. Today, I'm here to testify in favor of the Governor's proposal to allocate \$4 million for medication-assisted treatment in county jails, discuss concerns about general assistance in recovery housing, and support the expansion of crisis receiving centers across Maine.

In my role as a City Councilor, every spring I find myself engaged in a task akin to yours today – scrutinizing the City budget and grappling with tough decisions regarding its allocation. As part of this annual process, Kennebec County submits a request for a portion of their costs to be covered by our City budget. Legally bound to fulfill this request, we must accommodate it, even if it means raising taxes or sacrificing other essential city services. Over the past couple of years, Kennebec County has sought an increase in taxes from our City budget, primarily due to the expense of providing medication-assisted treatment services in our county jail.

I have dedicated my life to assisting individuals grappling with substance use disorder in accessing necessary services, and naturally, I support the availability of MAT in county jails. However, I do not believe it falls upon property owners to bear this financial burden. While I advocate for the federal government to remove the exclusion on federal healthcare coverage for incarcerated individuals, until then, it seems most appropriate for the State budget to shoulder these costs.

There have been suggestions that the Maine Recovery Council should cover these expenses, but I am hesitant about this proposition. While I do not speak for the Council, with 15 members on the council, each harboring differing perspectives on expenditure priorities, reaching a consensus, especially considering the substantial allocation of \$4 million out of the \$15 million available this year, seems improbable. We cannot afford to delay as budgets are currently under construction, and tax assessments are imminent. The infusion of \$4 million from the State budget would go a long way in addressing the concerns we face at both the City and County levels.

Speaking of recovery support services and the impact they are having on City budgets. Just last night, I attended a Winthrop Selectboard meeting, where the focal point was a newly established recovery residence in their community. This facility boasts 45 beds, making it the largest of its kind in the State of Maine. However, it's also causing ripples in their general assistance (GA) budget. In just a span of a few years, their GA budget has ballooned from \$10,000 annually to \$40,000, with over half of this year's budget already expended. Consequently, the Selectboard is contemplating a tax hike within their communities to sustain these residences. I think at this present moment, one way to help address these concerns is to increase general assistance reimbursement from 70% to 90%, while we work on a longer term funding solution for a recovery housing subsidy.

Lastly, I express my gratitude to the Governor for her initiative to allocate funds towards establishing a crisis receiving center in Lewiston this year. The presence of such a facility, available round-the-clock, will undoubtedly be transformative for Lewiston. However, our needs extend beyond this singular center. I draw your attention to LD 1975, a bill championed by Representative Crafts, currently progressing through the Health and Human Services Committee. This bill proposes investment in a comprehensive network of crisis receiving centers across Maine, addressing the broader needs of our communities. Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,
Courtney Gary-Allen, courtney@recoveryvoices.com

Testimony in Support of MAT Funding for Maine County Jails

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Robert Eric Austin, and I am a resident of Augusta, Maine. I am also an Augusta City Councilor and I serve on the Kennebec County Budget Committee. I stand before you today to advocate for the critical importance of providing the necessary funding from the State for **Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT)** to incarcerated individuals within our county jails.

1. The Opioid Crisis and MAT:

- Today, we still find ourselves mired in the drug and opioid crisis, affecting countless lives across our state. MAT is not just a treatment option; it is a lifeline for those struggling with substance use disorder.
- As we have come to know, MAT combines evidence-based medications with counseling and behavioral therapies. It has been proven effective in preventing relapse and reducing overdose deaths – helping to establish a gateway to long-term recovery.

2. Constitutional Rights and Access to Treatment:

- Our incarcerated population has the right to receive MAT, as guaranteed by both Maine and federal laws and regulations.
- Maine jails must provide screening, assessment, and medically managed withdrawal treatment. This includes MAT tailored to each individual's needs.

3. Personal Impact:

- I can attest to personally witnessing the transformative power of MAT. It stabilizes a person's life, allowing them to function as a normal human being.
- Access to MAT is not a luxury; it is a fundamental right. It provides hope, dignity, and the chance for a better future.

4. **Setting a Precedent:**

- The current funding of State mandated MAT program with County Tax revenues places an undue burden on County budgets and the municipalities charged with collecting that tax from individual property taxpayers. Funding the State mandated MAT program with State dollars honors the rights of prisoners throughout the state without placing an unfair burden on any municipality or individual property taxpayer.
- Let us set a precedent—one that recognizes MAT as a vital tool in our fight against addiction.
- By funding MAT programs in our county jails, we invest in rehabilitation, reduce recidivism, and save lives.

In conclusion, I urge you to allocate the necessary funds to support MAT in Maine County Jails. Let us prioritize compassion, evidence-based care, and the well-being of our fellow citizens. Together, we can make a difference—one person, one treatment at a time.

Thank you for your attention and commitment to this urgent cause.

Sincerely,

Robert Eric Austin - Augusta, Maine

References:

5. [Know Your Rights: Medication-Assisted Treatment in Maine Jails and Prisons](#)
6. [Federal Judge Rules Jail Must Allow Access to Medication-Assisted Treatment](#)
7. [Maine court case to tackle jails' medication-assisted treatment](#)

Source(s)

1. [Know Your Rights: Medication-Assisted Treatment in Maine Jails and ...](#)
2. [Federal Judge Rules Jail Must Allow Access to Medication-Assisted Treatment](#)
3. [Federal Court Will Hear Challenge to Ban on Medication Assisted ...](#)
4. [Maine court case to tackle jails' medication-assisted treatment](#)
5. [Court establishes incarcerated Mainers' right to medication-assisted ...](#)
6. [Maine Corrections Department Expanding Medication-Assisted Treatment To ...](#)