



CJPS Budget Testimony

February 29, 2024

Good Afternoon Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and Honorable Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety and Appropriations Committees,

My name is Tess Parks, and I am a Policy Organizer with Maine Recovery Advocacy Project (ME-RAP). I also have lived experience with finding long-term recovery from substance use disorder. I am here to testify on behalf of ME-RAP on portions of LD 2214.

We are supportive of the proposed \$4 million in the supplemental budget for medication assisted treatment and medical care in county jails. When a person with opioid use disorder re-enters society following incarceration, they are at the highest risk of experiencing a fatal overdose. Having access to medication-assisted treatment can be the difference between life or death for someone transitioning out of incarceration. Furthermore, this funding will help alleviate the tax burden of property owners whose property taxes are currently funding MAT in county jails. As long as people with opioid use disorder are involved with the criminal justice system, we will support funding for their healthcare in jails.

We firmly believe that families and communities throughout Maine will benefit the more we invest in services that help people with substance use disorder and mental health challenges avoid criminal justice involvement. As District Attorney of Cumberland County, Jacqueline Sartoris, noted in her testimony on the supplemental budget, many individuals that are now coming up through the mental health and treatment court dockets do not belong there. She also noted that jail is, "the single worst place to try to meet their needs." We urge legislators to fund parts of the supplemental budget that help folks get the services they need to avoid incarceration, such as the proposed receiving center in Lewiston and funding to enhance mobile crisis units.

At a time when we are facing a housing crisis, an opioid epidemic, and a strained mental health system, there are still so many unmet needs. Every dollar we invest in services in the short-term will reduce costs in the long run. The more we support Maine families and communities in overcoming today's challenges, the more return on investment we will see in the future.

I thank you for your time and would be happy to answer any questions.

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