

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



March 4, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and honorable members of the Health and Human Services committee,

My name is Jan Collins, I am assistant director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC) and a member of the Franklin County Jail Board of Visitors.

MPAC's mission is to support Maine's incarcerated citizens, their families, and friends in their struggle with Maine's criminal justice system. Our purpose is to reduce Maine's use of incarceration by creating a criminal justice system that is ethical, humane, and restorative in nature. But, more than anything we believe in prevention, including intervention that protects individuals and elevates safety in our communities. That is why I am here in support of LD 2237 An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health, and Well-being.

In a June 16, 2019 article in the Portland Press Herald¹, fifteen years after AMHI's closure, then Senator Cathy Breen is quoted as saying ““We have defaulted our mental health services to law enforcement. The system we have now isn't treatment, it's crisis management. You shouldn't have to commit a crime to get treatment.”

Closure of AMHI met with a rise in the number of people incarcerated with mental health diagnosis. In testimony before the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee several years ago. Sheriff Joyce of Cumberland County noted that 83% of residents in his jail were on

psychotropic meds for substantive mental health issues. National statistics show 44% of jail residents with mental health diagnosis with 64% stating that they did not receive any mental health care while incarcerated.²

Jails are expensive and ineffective mental health crisis management units, they receive people, often on the worst day of their lives into a trauma filled environment not conducive to healing. Treatment is minimal at best, trained staff stretched thin, sleep and exercise fleeting.

This bill will fill the gaps in community services that have plagued us since the closure of AMHI 20 years ago. It will make treatment in the community a priority, expand mobile units, provide medication management services, and create community receiving centers.

It will also focus on violence prevention programs.

It is my hope that those programs will be expanded to jails and prisons and be made available to all residents.

Please give your unanimous support to LD 2237 An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and Well-being.

With Appreciation,

Jan M. Collins

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¹<https://www.pressherald.com/2019/06/16/fifteen-years-after-amhis-closure-mental-health-system-still-fractured/> Fifteen years after AMHI's closure, mental health system still fractured. Despite a promise to provide resources to the severely mentally ill living in communities across the state, Maine has often failed to deliver.

²https://www.prisonpolicy.org/research/mental_health/#:~:text=Percent%20of%20people%20in%20state,care%20while%20incarcerated%3A%2066%25%20%2B Policies and practices surrounding mental health in jails and prisons