

Monday, March 4th, 2024

LD 2237 An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health, and Well-being by Expanding Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Diane Kew, and I live in Brunswick, Maine.

When I was 16, I tried to commit suicide, and then I tried again when I was an adult. It was only after the second time that I was diagnosed with clinical depression. Since then, I have been able to manage my depression, raise two great kids, stay in a committed marriage, and hold professional positions over my lifetime. People who don't know me well generally would not guess that I struggle with mental health issues.

That's why I need to take you back to the early 2000s before I had my diagnosis. At that time, my two children—who were less than two years apart—did not get along. Specifically, my eldest was jealous because he had to share my time with a younger sibling. I cannot remember what his action was, but I do know that my response was egregious: I yelled at him so vehemently that he froze and began crying so hard he nearly threw up. I was stunned. I loved him. Why was I such a monster? Surely I was not fit to be their mother.

And so I started to figure out a way to remove myself from the situation. It felt incredibly difficult and complicated and involved numerous, somewhat convoluted conversations with my friends and family trying to sort out how I could ensure that my children would be safe. My husband clued in and called my sister. She talked to me, and they determined I was a danger to myself. In the end, they convinced me to make an appointment with my doctor, and I began receiving treatment for my medical condition.

If stronger and more expansive mental health crisis response services had been available 24/7 (Part A of your bill), I think I would have used them. And I think if my husband and sister had known what resources were available, then they could have reached out for help instead of fretting in a vacuum over an entire weekend. Also, if there had been an Office of Violence Prevention (Part C of your bill), and more suicide prevention education materials (Part E of your bill), then maybe I would have been more aware and better educated about not being such an anomaly. And if there was expanded access to medication management services (Part D of your bill), I might not have had to wait four days to start using the medicine I needed.

Am I ashamed of what I did? Absolutely. Yet I bare my soul so I can pay it forward. I do not want anyone to go through what I did. It is unnecessary. And, sadly, I am not alone. There always have been and there always will be others who need the very help I did. And not everyone has the strong support system I do, but everyone deserves it.

So I am here to implore you, please vote "ought to pass" on LD 2237. Thank you.