

March 4, 2024

Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Brittany Lorange, I live in Pittston, and I am an Outreach Coordinator for The Consumer Council System of Maine. I am here today to strongly endorse LD 2237, "An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and Well-being by Expanding Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources."

This bill's focus on strengthening mobile crisis intervention, particularly the inclusion of peer support specialists, aligns perfectly with our mission to advance recovery-oriented, consumer-driven mental health care and peer-run recovery opportunities.

People in crisis often connect best with those who have shared similar experiences. Peer support specialists are individuals with lived experience of mental health challenges who have undergone training to offer support and guidance to others. Their presence on mobile crisis teams is invaluable for several reasons:

Peers can build trust and rapport with individuals in crisis more quickly due to their lived experience. They can validate feelings and offer a sense of hope based on their own recovery journey.

Peers are adept at de-escalation techniques and can navigate challenging situations with empathy and understanding. This can be crucial in preventing a crisis from escalating further.

By having a diverse pool of peer support specialists representing various communities, these teams can provide culturally competent care, ensuring responsiveness to the unique needs of each individual.

The proposed funding for six receiving centers in Maine presents an exciting opportunity. However, it's critical to ensure these programs are "peer-heavy," with a staffing ratio favoring peer support specialists over solely clinical staff. Peers offer a distinct and vital perspective, working alongside clinical professionals to provide a well-rounded approach to crisis intervention.

Including a range of peer support specialists who reflect the cultural and demographic makeup of the communities they serve will foster trust and ensure effective intervention for all.

By prioritizing peer support in mobile crisis teams and ensuring culturally competent care, LD 2237 has the potential to significantly improve mental health crisis intervention in Maine. This investment will not only enhance public safety but also promote well-being and offer crucial support to those experiencing a crisis.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge you to pass LD 2237 and prioritize building a stronger mental health crisis response system for Maine.

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