

TO: The Honorable Joseph Baldacci
The Honorable Michele Meyer
Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services

DATE: March 4, 2024

RE: An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health and Well-being by Expanding Services
and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources - Speaker. Rachel Talbot Ross of
Portland

Good morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the committee.

My name is Starr Gilmartin, a resident of Trenton, Maine. I am a licensed clinical social worker, and I am also a volunteer on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Maine. I am here today because I am a passionate advocate for strengthening our public safety, health, and well-being, and for expanding mental health services. I am testifying Ought to Pass on LD 2237.

I am certain that some, if not all of you, have visited an emergency room at some point. Most people associate emergency rooms with treating medical emergencies. What is certain is that no one wants to go to one. What is less well known is that many emergency rooms in our area are treating more mental health emergencies than medical emergencies on any given day or night. Our small rural hospitals in the State are especially ill-equipped to do that. The Surgeon General of the U.S. has said Maine has a mental health crisis.

I know this all too well. I work primarily in emergency rooms evaluating and attempting to treat people who are in crisis. People who come to the ER in a mental health crisis can be children, adolescents, or adults; they may be experiencing trauma from an assault, previous combat, childhood or partner abuse; they may be suicidal or homicidal or violent. They may be experiencing psychosis; they may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs or in withdrawal from these mind-altering substances; they may be delirious, grieving, depressed, or manic, unable to sleep.

Although I don't need statistics to demonstrate what I see each and every day I go to work, we have increasing numbers of individuals with mental illness – as well as substance abuse, with drug overdoses spiking – and not enough resources to address them. Too many people are literally stuck in the emergency room for days, weeks, even

months waiting for a psychiatric hospital bed, detox bed, or residential substance abuse treatment. Most outpatient services have wait lists that can be as long as a year. If they have no insurance, they may not get these services at all. Imagine, if you will, people who may be despairing, feeling hopeless, helpless, desperate, and feeling alone, they may feel they have no alternative because we aren't helping, then to do something unthinkable; unimaginable. Please help me, help them. Please vote to pass LD 2237.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.