

LD 2237: An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health, and Well-being by Expanding Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources**Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.**

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine strongly encourages the passage of LD 2237: An Act to Strengthen Public Safety, Health, and Well-being by Expanding Services and Coordinating Violence Prevention Resources. NAMI Maine represents the one in four Mainers who face mental health challenges each year, as well as their families and loved ones. NAMI Maine provides support, education, and resources to those navigating their own mental health journeys, as well as the complex mental health system in place across our state. We also provide upstream programming with evidence-based resources and programming to attempt to divert from higher levels of care. Because of our membership and work in communities NAMI Maine is in a unique position to speak to requests and concerns from families in York to Aroostook Counties and everywhere in between.

Our state continues to recover from the tragic event in Lewiston, which seems all too common in our country. In the aftermath NAMI Maine's multiple programs have provided resources and support and we continue to remain committed to supporting all impacted, as well as advocating for non-stigmatizing and meaningful change. As we consider how to move forward, and prevent a tragedy like this from occurring in our state again, we cannot ignore that certain factors of this event presents as an anomaly. Nationally, only 3-4% of violent crime can be contributed to mental illness, and research shows that mental illness is not an indicator for gun violence.

What is not an anomaly is the need for behavioral health services in our communities and resources to support Mainers in crisis. In 2022 720 Mainers died from drug overdoses, 639 deaths in our communities were alcohol induced, and 270 people died by suicide. As such, we strongly support the passage of LD 2237, as it addresses many significant deficits our current systems have and will save lives. NAMI Maine has been advocating and hearing this committee approve and discussing many of the mentioned items in this bill prior to my time with the organization and prior to many of you sitting on the committee now. Although all our predecessors worked diligently towards these models, the time is now for us, as a state, to finally push these needs to the forefront and ensure that our lasting legacies are evidence-based, meaningful, programming. A legacy of moving forward from discussion to action.

NAMI Maine strongly urges this committee to ensure that the state of Maine continues to move forward with best practice measures that will help all Mainers, whether mental illness is impacting their lives today or in the future. We need to ensure that we support those most vulnerable and provide the highest level of support and resources during their most difficult times. By investing in crisis behavioral health care, we are ensuring the health and well-being of

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our family and neighbors. There is no time like the present, and we have learned we have no time to wait.

ABOUT NAMI MAINE: Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.

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