



**Testimony in Opposition of
LD 59: An Act to Ban the Drug Tianeptine**

February 3, 2025

Good Afternoon Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and Honorable Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Courtney Gary-Allen, and I am the Executive Director of Maine Recovery Action Project (ME-RAP), a bipartisan grassroots network dedicated to addressing substance use issues in Maine through community-driven and policy-based solutions. I am here today to testify on behalf of ME-RAP in strong opposition to LD 59: *An Act to Ban the Drug Tianeptine*.

For too many years, Maine has experienced a costly and devastating overdose crisis. While we support what we believe is the intention of this bill, which is to help combat our addiction crisis, we know that *criminalizing more legal drugs is not the answer*. Ultimately, removing a substance from legal markets will shift the demand for these substances to illicit markets, which historically offer more dangerous and lethal substances to drug consumers. A clear example of the iron law of prohibition in drug markets is looking at what happened following the mass overprescription of pharmaceutical opioids. The intention to cut back on overprescribing was to curb opioid addiction rates and reduce overdose deaths, but the results have proven to be fatal. Opioid overdoses involving illicit opioids, such as fentanyl, have claimed the lives of hundreds of Mainers since the onset of the opioid epidemic.

The costs of criminalizing drug use in Maine are high. State and local governments spend about \$110 million annually on this endeavor, and individuals in the criminal justice system end up paying \$33 million per year for criminalization and incarceration¹. Individuals with a criminal record often face barriers when seeking housing, education, and employment. Many families financially support their loved ones that are incarcerated, and they continue to bear those costs if their loved one has a hard time finding employment post-incarceration.

Rather than adding another substance to the Schedule W drug list, we urge this committee to continue to invest in public education, prevention efforts, substance use disorder treatment, and recovery resources. This bill was defeated last session, and we believe it is time to invest our time in other policy solutions. The more we prioritize policy solutions that get to the root of addiction and that offer paths to long term recovery, the less social and economic costs we will accrue in the long run. Maine can simply not afford more loss and harm.

I thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.

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¹ "A Better Path for Maine: The case for decriminalizing drugs". ACLU Maine & Maine Center for Economic Policy. March 21, 2022.