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Testimony Neither for Nor Against LD 51: An Act to Increase Oversight of Fatalities of and Serious Injuries to Adults Subject to Public Guardianship

Jennifer Putnam, Executive Director, Waypoint Maine, Inc. & Chair, Mortality Review Panel

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committees.

I'm Jennifer Putnam, Executive Director of Waypoint, an almost sixty-year-old organization located in southern York County. Waypoint serves hundreds of children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism, from our pre-K through Grade 5 school to a full range of adult services. It was a privilege for me to work with Representative Dale Denno on the original Mortality Review Panel language before he passed away in 2019. He was a tireless advocate for Maine people who were most vulnerable to abuse or neglect. I have served on the Mortality Review Panel since it launched and currently serve as the Chair of the panel.

I was pleased to learn of the Governor's proposed changes to the Mortality Review panel, specifically to include adults who are under public guardianship. You may recall the article in the Maine Monitor published in September 2023 (<https://themainemonitor.org/eight-deaths-raise-questions-about-oversight-of-maines-public-guardianships/>), which identified multiple questionable deaths of adults under public guardianship. At that time, Senator Baldacci called for increased oversight to ensure the safety and well-being of people under public guardianship.



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As a member of the Mortality Review panel, I learn about and review some heartbreaking cases of people who have died unexpectedly while receiving Home and Community Based Services here in Maine. The panel's role is to identify systemic changes which might have made a difference for them, and which might prevent other serious injuries and deaths in the future.

As a uniquely vulnerable population, adults under public guardianship deserve to be represented and I am grateful to Governor Mills for bringing this forward.

There are additional changes to the statute which may also improve the makeup of the panel and enhance its capacity for analyzing the often-complex cases that are brought forward. Adding a medical provider and a representative from Adult Protective Services can only serve to support the panel's statutory charge. A third change, the addition of someone with lived experience having received services, will further serve to give voice to people who, in many cases, have long been unheard in the system of care we operate in.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

Jennifer Putnam

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