

Good morning, Senator Routundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Appropriation and Health and Human Services Committees. My name is Genevieve Lysen, I have been in sustained recovery for 12 years, I am a certified recovery coach and I am the Organizing Director for the Maine People's Alliance. Our 32,000 members stretch from Kittery to Fort Kent. We are committed to creating a state of Maine where everyone has what they need, everyone contributes what they can, and no one is left behind.

I am here today because I am concerned about proposals in the budget that increase funding to law enforcement, but cut community based services like crisis-receiving centers.

We can all agree that too many Mainers are struggling with mental health issues, substance use disorder and lack of access to supportive services they need. They are our sisters, brothers, cousins, co-workers, neighbors, parents, and children. The resources we use arresting and jailing people for drug possession or mental health crisis would be much more effective if we reinvested them in a public health response. We support policies that prioritize compassionate care over criminalization. This budget does the opposite.

As I do, my cousin Samuel struggled with depression and a substance use disorder. His experiences over the years with the courts and law enforcement made him feel hopeless, worthless, like a criminal, when he was hurting and he needed support, help and love. Sam died of drug poisoning in 2021, when he was 4 years into recovery and re-establishing a close, loving relationship with his son, Milo. If Sam had been able to access services and support he needed to sustain his recovery, I expect he would be alive and thriving today. The proposal in this budget to eliminate crisis receiving centers in Kennebec and Aroostook counties, will create undue suffering and it could cause more needless death. I don't want other kids to suffer the loss that Milo did.

I urge you to invest in public health, restore funding to the crisis receiving centers, and divest in law enforcement strategies to address drug and mental health crisis, as it's been proven to be ineffective and harmful to our communities.

Thank you for your time today.

Genevieve Lysen, Lewiston