



Testimony on LD 210

Good Afternoon Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Health and Human Services and Appropriations Committees,

My name is Tess Parks. I am the Policy Director of the Maine Recovery Action Project (ME-RAP), a grassroots network of Mainers working on community and public policy based solutions to substance use. I am here today to testify on the proposed biennial budget on behalf of our statewide network of people in recovery from substance use.

Given the constraints of limited resources, it is crucial that Maine's budget prioritize investments in proven solutions that not only address the immediate needs of our community members but also have a long-term return on investment. In the midst of a housing crisis, an opioid epidemic, and an escalating mental health crisis, the proposed budget includes the troubling elimination of funding for crisis receiving centers in Aroostook and Kennebec counties. Funding was secured in the 131st legislative session for these centers as a direct response to the overwhelming need for services that provide immediate stabilization and connections to vital resources.

While these essential services face the threat of being cut, the proposed budget includes a significant increase in funding for the Department of Public Safety—from \$43.6 million to over \$60 million. For context, between 2014 and 2019, MaineCare spending on substance use treatment, adjusted for inflation, increased by just 2%, while state and local spending on corrections rose by 13%, and police enforcement spending grew by 14%¹. This disproportionate focus on punitive measures has contributed to an insufficient investment in public health solutions, which has led to long waitlists for mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) services.

From our conversations with providers, our understanding is that some potential providers for the Crisis Receiving Centers in Kennebec and Aroostook County believe they will be unable to staff these facilities. If that is the case and the centers cannot open, we urge your committee to reallocate these funds to the peer led recovery and mental health centers.

The need for substance use and mental health services in these communities remains urgent, and peer recovery and mental health centers are currently providing critical support without sufficient funding. Ultimately, this funding was designated for mental health and substance use services and should not be redirected elsewhere when the need remains so great.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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¹ <https://www.aclumaine.org/en/betterpathreport>