



Peggy Rotundo
Senator, District 21

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony in Support of LD 1425

“An Act to Improve Access to Sustainable and Low-barrier Trauma Recovery Services”

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

May 7, 2025

Good morning Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and the other distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Peggy Rotundo, and I have the privilege of representing the City of Lewiston in Senate District 21. I am here today to introduce LD 1425, “An Act to Improve Access to Sustainable and Low-barrier Trauma Recovery Services.”

The Maine Resiliency Center was established in the wake of Maine’s deadliest mass violence event that occurred in Lewiston on October 25, 2023. The MRC serves October 25th victims and survivors, witnesses, first responders, and professionals supporting those impacted. It also serves the family, friends and loved ones of those impacted, as well as members of the broader community affected by the mass shooting.

While Lewiston was the location of this tragedy, this proposed legislation is about far more than just Lewiston. Since opening in 2023, the MRC has served over 600 Mainers from 60 Maine communities. Even a year and a half later, the Center continues to see new people in need of support. The MRC’s peer-informed, low-barrier approach means people get help when they need it most, without delay or red tape. It is open to all - no insurance, in take or formal diagnosis is needed. MRC staff and contracted providers help bridge people through their most challenging times while connecting them to community resources for ongoing therapy and other support.

In talking with the staff and those impacted by October 25, I’ve come to understand the MRC’s work as services meant to provide support and resources to those who may not “fit” into traditional services because they don’t meet the criteria for a diagnosis, they cannot manage working through formal systems when they’re in traumatized free-fall, they cannot wait for our over-burdened systems to respond to them, or: the services they encounter don’t match the severity of the trauma they’ve suffered.

At the request of the City of Lewiston, the MRC opened nearly three weeks after the shooting with no guidebook and no list of victims or those impacted: “just” trauma-informed staff trained in behavioral health and victim advocacy. Through the last year and a half, the MRC has become an

integral part of the system of victims' services in Maine that fills our systems' significant gaps, offering support for people who would otherwise fall through the cracks.

I understand that when we say "support" or "resources" it can be hard to really grasp what that means for a community of people impacted by the largest mass violence event in Maine history. I want to tell you what that looks like, from what I've heard from staff and from victims themselves:

- An MRC staff member went to Lewiston's Splittin' Wood Axe Throwing knowing that first responders would be there, and wound up sitting and talking with several of them for hours while the owners let them stay long after closing.

- A 7-year-old survivor from Just-in-Time Bowling who still has nightmares and has traumatic responses to classmates popping chip bags because they sound like gunshots: he noted that the only place where other kids understand him – and don't give him a hard time - is the MRC.

- A law enforcement officer who stops by the MRC to "see how everyone is doing" and stays for an hour talking with a staff member.

- Staff members, at the "end" of an 8- or 10-hour day, go to Wednesday night youth bowling league and to cornhole night to be available if they are needed. They always end up staying until at least 8 or 9 pm, talking with people who need their support.

- A man who – positive his wife was dead inside the bowling alley – ran outside with his father and was helping people run away from the bowling alley in the immediate aftermath. He turned to see his dad on the ground, because his dad could not run anymore. Afraid that the shooter was still in the area, he laid on top of his father to protect him. Thankfully, he later found his wife alive, and: they both still need help from the MRC staff to manage their traumatic reactions and to help them work through everyday issues that come up that remind them of the shooting.

- The wife who still doesn't want to let her husband out of her sight because he was in the restroom when Robert Card opened fire: they both still need the MRC's help to work through their trauma.

- The elderly brother of a person shot and killed on October 25 who after learning about this proposed legislation said, "You tell everyone that this place saved me, okay? It saved me. It. Saved. Me." He regularly attends support groups for older adults impacted by the shooting and in fact asked if the MRC could rent a bus to bring folks to Augusta in support. (The MRC did not rent a bus!)

- The father whose son was shot and killed after giving others a precious 16 seconds to run by fighting Robert Card was finally convinced by his wife to attend a support group at the MRC who said, "I can simply say the support group saved my life. Time does not heal this wound. My life is over as I know it. At this point I don't think I could go on without my advocates and friends at the Resiliency Center."

- The Deaf person who was injured at Schemengees can walk into the MRC and they will be met by staff who know how to communicate with and respond to them and support them.

Today, you will hear from many other people today impacted by the shooting, and from many others who wrote testimony but could not be here due to work or family obligations. And one common

thread winds through all those speaking today: long after the news cycle moves on, the difficult and often heart-breaking work of healing continues.

For those who lived it, October 25 did not end when Robert Card was found. It did not end when the Independent Commission to Investigate the Facts of the Tragedy in Lewiston issued their report. It did not end when we reached the one-year mark. It does not end when people tell survivors of October 25 to get over it.

What fades from our view continues in the lives of those affected. And what's more – the place that has been a lifeline to so many – the Maine Resiliency Center – has created a different path forward in responding to Maine people who have experienced significant grief and trauma.

As we well know, Maine people experience life-changing traumatic events every day: law enforcement officers and first responders whose cumulative trauma impacts their work and families, community members who live in high conflict areas where gun violence is an issue, school children whose teacher is killed in a murder/suicide, a person who stops at a horrific car crash on the way home to have a crash victim die in their arms as they wait for the ambulance.

While a small fraction of those folks can access victim services, **many more Maine people dealing with the impacts of significant trauma do not have the dedicated support**, connection, and information necessary – and without unnecessary barriers - to heal and lead happier, more productive lives. We need a different approach – and the MRC is that different approach.

This bill provides critical funding to keep the Maine Resiliency Center open beyond the federal spending deadline and expand its trauma-informed services statewide. LD 1425 builds on the Center's experience after October 25th, ensuring continued care for survivors and broader access for all Mainers impacted by significant grief and trauma.

People and communities across Maine can **benefit from the trauma response system that the MCR has created - without the added cost and time of duplicating similar systems**. Building from what the MRC has created - and particularly because its work has reached across the state without increasing its physical locations - **is far less costly** than creating yet another center from scratch when the next crisis hits or managing the fallout when our community members face extreme trauma and grief and have nowhere to turn.

My colleagues on both sides of the aisle know our budget challenges as well as I do. And: funding the MRC to continue this work isn't just the cheapest way forward. Keeping the MRC open is just the right thing to do: no survivor should be left to figure out so much alone. No seven-year-old in Maine should ever have to wait for weeks or months to get help and to feel normal again because we've been short-sighted and let this resource go. No law enforcement officer should go without support. No person who has protected their loved one with their own body – afraid that their spouse had been murdered – should be without help.

I ask for your support of LD 1425 so the critical work of the Maine Resiliency Center may continue to serve those affected by the trauma of the October 25th mass shootings *and* help those in other parts of the state who have or will experience trauma in the future.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill. I am happy to answer any questions I can.