

Testimony in Support of "An Act to Provide Peer Respite for Individuals with Mental Health Care Needs"

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My name is Jason Goodrich. I'm a lifelong public servant and a Mainer by choice for the past 35 years. I've worked in the trenches of crisis response, homelessness outreach, and mental health case management. But I'm not just someone who's worked in the system—I've been through it. I am a psychiatric survivor. A mental health treatment recipient. I have been in and through the crisis system as it currently exists. I've seen what helps—and what harms.

Today, I rise in strong support of "An Act to Provide Peer Respite for Individuals with Mental Health Care Needs"—because this bill gives us a chance to do something better.

Peer respite is not a buzzword. It's not fluff. It's a lifeline—offering voluntary, short-term mental health support in a safe, home-like setting, run by people who have walked that same hard road. It's not a locked door. It's an open one. It's not about force. It's about trust. It's not a holding tank or a ward. It's a refuge.

Peer respite centers give people a place to go before things fall apart. Before police get called. Before the hospital. Before another trauma stacks on top of the last. The people offering support aren't strangers in uniforms. They're peers—people with lived experience who know what it feels like to break, and what it takes to heal.

I know this state's budget isn't infinite. But let's be honest—we're already spending far more on less effective options. Emergency room stays for mental health crises cost over \$1,200 per day. Inpatient hospitalization, even more. Peer respite programs? Often **less than \$300 a day**. And the research backs it: they **reduce hospitalizations, reduce trauma, reduce costs**—and they help people stay in their communities, not locked away from them.

While other proposals this session would spend more money to tighten the grip of coercion—relying on force, on courts, on confinement—this bill offers a different road. A gentler road. A smarter one. It says: **let's try healing before control. Let's meet people with presence, not paperwork.**

Other states have already figured this out—Vermont, Georgia, California, Wisconsin. There's no reason Maine should be behind on something so essential.

One center won't meet every need. But it plants a flag in the ground. It says we believe in people. It says we believe that healing is possible when we stop leading with fear. It's a step forward in a field that's been walking in circles for too long.

This bill isn't just policy—it's a reckoning. A recognition that the old ways have failed too many of us, for too long.

Support this bill, and you're choosing a path grounded in respect, not restraint. In hope, not fear. You're saying that Maine's answer to suffering is not more silence, more force, more institutions—but connection. Humanity. Care that actually works.

Let's build a system that honors people instead of managing them. Let's finally do something different—something that heals.

Thank you.