

May 9, 2025

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Kerri Pitts, and I am a resident of Augusta. I am here today to testify in **support of LD 1843, "An Act to Provide Peer Respite for Individuals with Mental Health Care Needs"**.

I have been a vocal advocate for much of my personal life as an adult, and most recently in a professional capacity as well. So, I typically write testimony from that perspective and often do not include any personal details. However, today I am compelled to bring my personal story to light.

As a proud Maine resident of the last 12 years, I have always been proud of this state for many reasons. I am a mental health peer with lived experience, and I am grateful to the systems that have given me the support that I've needed while living here. Raised in the deep south, I was unknowingly encountering folks that needed vital mental health support without the systems that could support them. My adoptive mother suffered with the symptoms of severe bipolar disorder my entire childhood. I believe if she were given more community support options, she would have been able to face these challenges through a lens of recovery and healing.

I began experiencing symptoms of religion-related and adoption-related CPTSD in my young adulthood and due to the lack of knowledge and resources throughout my upbringing, I was lost with where to seek help. I was forced to continue moving through life as normal, neglecting the realities of the level of support I needed. At 23 years old, I became my mother's guardian after losing my father at age 17, all the while attempting to address my own mental health needs. I was suffering in silence because of an inability to voice my need for support. I am telling you my story today to inform you of the need for more community-based mental health resources. Had peer respite been an option for me during this and other unmanageable times in my life, I believe I could have navigated them with more understanding and greater coping skills. Our peer support services in this state are a great first step in addressing the state's needs and adding peer respite would only strengthen the network of services available.

Please consider those suffering in silence that are walking alongside us every day that could benefit greatly from this center as a place of solace and support.

I urge you to pass LD 1843 to continue reinforcing the need for additional community mental health support in our great state.

Kerri Pitts
Augusta