

Good morning Representative Amy J. Roeder and esteemed members of the health and human services committee, my name is Mitch Degere, I am a resident of Auburn and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1843.

I dedicate this testimony to my siblings and my sister Sue Lenhoff Degere who past on March13 2025.

In 1991, my Parents, siblings, a Psychotherapist, and my Peer Support came together at my invitation.

I said out loud.....

I had been raped by "Smiler" an elderly neighbor"

Therapist interjects: "To be clear, Mitch has just divulged that he was raped by a neighbor when he was five."

My Peer Support Interjects: "Mitch, how did you get there?"

Therapist immediately Interjects: "Good question"

Deep elongated silence

Brother: My god! "Smiler" put me on his bench in the back of his garage and took my tie off, brother breaks down, angry.

My poor Parents just took a punch in the gut. My mom and dad were two wonderful people, and this was the price for a lack of supervision 25 years earlier, influenced by alcoholism and family dynamics.

It was Perfect, everybody did what they were supposed to do. It had integrity, the dignity and respect were embedded and my parents, siblings, Peer and I began our longest journey together.

This experience occurred outside the hospital, and I would go on to have (3) 6 week stays on a Psych ward after taking an overdose to take my life, in western Massachusetts. After my first 6 week stay, I would take another overdose 18 months later, this is very common, too common. I know that a peer respite program had it been available, potentially may have prevented the 2nd attempt as a step down.

The hundreds of "peers" that I have working relationships with have experienced profound levels of trauma, shame, humiliation, and isolation. The women who I have worked with that have lost custody of their children to the state all have the same "underpinnings"; rape from biological fathers, stepfathers, brothers, uncles, and their mothers feeling powerless to stop it. In a group we initiated titled "moms in Mourning" they have shared their stories of feeling humiliated at hospitals and wanting to return to isolation. "Too controlling and too many negative power dynamics", what they did like was the connection with their peers in groups. Their grief will never end. I am so honored to know these women and all my peers, they are not lazy, irresponsible, or out of control, and most are not mentally ill.

In the root causes as mentioned above; humiliation, shame, oppression, and isolation experienced surely should not be experienced in the treatment! You don't have to be a Dr or an expert to know that that's not going to work. Intentional Peer Support in my experience provides the intense connection like No other, and Peer Support Respite are a win, win.

I refuse to pin Psychotherapy, hospitalized mental health care and Peer Support against one another. It is my hope to create an alliance through healthy dialogue to try to make sense of a complicated world, to increase my flexibility, reduce my biases, and open the possibility of joining something larger together. We need to build bridges a creative effort to bring our legitimate tasks, principles, missions, and roles to speak to one another in search for common ground. Thank you for your attention.