

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT**LD 1843 An Act to Provide Peer Respite for Individuals with Mental Health Care Needs**

Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of LD 1843, *An Act to Provide Peer Respite for Individuals with Mental Health Care Needs*. The peer respite centers model has been found to divert individuals from hospitals, the criminal justice system, and other higher and more costly levels of care.

Maine has followed the national trend of reducing psychiatric hospital beds without increasing access to community-based providers. While we no longer hold individuals for decades in psychiatric institutions, we have replaced that form of institutionalization by keeping a record number of people with mental illness within the corrections system: 70-80% of county jail inmates are on mental health medication, as is 60% of DOC's population. We also see a large number of individuals with mental health struggles receiving care in emergency departments, with 1/8 of all emergency department visits annually in the United States due to behavioral disorders.¹ Peer respite centers have been demonstrated in other parts of the country as a cost-effective and supportive alternative.

One study found that by implementing a peer respite center, inpatient psychiatric placements and emergency room visits for mental health crises decreased by 70%.² Pierce County, Washington, reduced involuntary hospitalization by 32% by using certified peer specialists offering respite services, leading to a savings of 1.99 million dollars in one year.³ The resources and supports outlined in this legislation provide critical and best-practice services for our neighbors. The number and costs of mental health crises have increased significantly.

The solution regarding building sustainable crisis services is not always to continue with the path that has been set forward but to ensure we are considering models that are leading other parts of the country in treating individuals experiencing a mental health crisis or challenge in the most respectful, least restrictive, and decriminalizing manner, as well as best practice and cost-effective manner. At one time, Maine successfully utilized peer respite centers, providing supportive environments in line with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration identifying key components in the crisis continuum as ensuring that individuals have a place to go when in crisis, along with the critical importance of peer support.⁴ Because of this, NAMI Maine supports the passage of LD 1843.

ABOUT NAMI MAINE: Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.

¹ Trends in Emergency Department Visits Involving Mental and Substance Use Disorders, 2006-2013

² Peer Respite Research — Live & Learn, Inc.

³ Evidence-Peer-Support-May-2019.pdf

⁴ National Behavioral Health Crisis Care Guidance | SAMHSA

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POSITIONS & POLICY AGENDA

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