

Honorable members of this committee:

My name is Cynthia Grier; I live in Warren, Maine; and I am speaking today in support of L.D. 1866 and the important work of Disability Rights Maine's Advocates.

I have worked as a Maine Certified Intentional Peer Support Specialist (CIPSS) for nine years. During this time, I have supported many people who receive mental health care services for disabling mental health conditions. These services are provided for the most part by very well meaning mental health professionals who work in large, powerful healthcare agencies. In spite of the best intentions of professionals and the power and prestige of healthcare agencies, the rights and basic needs of the people in their care often fall through the cracks.

What happens to an individual when they receive a disabling mental health diagnosis? It can mean that they lose their ability to speak on behalf of their own rights and to be heard. It can mean that no one takes them seriously, because their observations can be brushed off as manifestations of mental illness. It is an extremely vulnerable place to be, and it opens the door to abuses of power and tragic degradation of human rights and in extreme situations can mean the loss of life. This is where the important work of Disability Rights Maine comes in.

In my time as a Peer Support Specialist I have observed many situations in which people's needs and rights have been disregarded by supposedly well-meaning professionals who claim to know what is better for a person, without recognizing the harm caused by denying an individual their rights. I have also observed situations of clear neglect, when mental health professionals have failed to provide the services for which they are paid. In one such case, a person died.

During my time as a CIPSS, I have also observed lapses in services at a mental health residence be corrected thanks to the work of a DRM Advocate. For this reason, I am grateful to DRM's Advocates for their work. I hope you will support L.D. 1866 and insure the continuation of their advocacy for people with serious mental health diagnoses.

Thank you for your time.