

Testimony of Sgt. Aaron Skolfield
Sagadahoc County Sheriff's Office
Before the Maine Health and Human Services Committee
Regarding Progressive Treatment Programs and **LD 1989**

Sen. Ingwerson, Rep Meyer, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I'm here to offer a law-enforcement and public-safety perspective on Progressive Treatment Programs, and to speak in support of **LD 1989**, which should reimburse law enforcement for PTP-related transports and services, with an appropriate cap on reimbursement.

You will hear today from Disability Rights Maine. They will argue that PTPs are unlawful, unconstitutional, and coercive. They will say these programs violate due process and civil liberties.

From where we stand in law enforcement, that argument ignores reality.

When individuals with severe brain disorders lose insight into their illness, they often refuse treatment—not because of an informed choice, but because the illness itself prevents that insight. When treatment breaks down, the system does not become more rights-protective. It becomes reactive.

And when it becomes reactive, **law enforcement becomes the default mental health system.**

We respond to repeated crisis calls. We transport people in psychiatric distress. We assist with emergency hospitalizations. Sometimes we arrest individuals whose behavior is driven by untreated illness rather than criminal intent. That is not humane, and it is not what civil-rights advocacy should be producing.

PTPs exist to interrupt that cycle. They are **less restrictive than repeated involuntary hospitalization** and far less restrictive than jail. When treatment is consistent and enforced through the courts, we see fewer emergencies, fewer dangerous encounters, and fewer traumatic interventions for everyone involved—including officers.

But here is the part that is often ignored: **PTPs rely on law enforcement.**

When someone decompensates, refuses treatment, or needs transport for evaluation, officers are called. These calls are time-intensive, medically complex, and often involve long transports and extended supervision. None of this is routine policing.

LD 1989 recognizes that reality.

It does not expand PTP authority.

It does not create new mandates.

Under Maine PTP law guardians, law enforcement and qualified medical personnel can initiate

or renew a PTP. A reimbursement cap on legal expenses is reasonable. It protects taxpayers while acknowledging that these services have real costs.

Disability Rights Maine may argue that eliminating or weakening PTPs protects liberty. But without PTPs the result is not freedom. It is more crises, more emergency hospitalizations, and more law-enforcement encounters under worse conditions.

LD 1989 supports stability, accountability, and fairness. It should recognize the role law enforcement already plays and ensure that role is sustainable.

I urge the Committee to be cautious of claims that PTPs are unlawful, and to support LD 1989 with a clear reimbursement cap and adding guardians, law enforcement and qualified medical personnel to those who can receive reimbursement for legal costs.

Thank you for your time.