



Public Hearing Testimony in Support of LD 2108: An Act to Establish the Suicide Mortality Review Panel

Distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Kiley Wilkens-O'Brien and I reside in South Portland. I am a licensed social worker, public health strategist, and the individual tasked with leading Maine's Suicide Mortality Review planning effort. I am here today to speak in strong support of LD 2108.

Public health is about learning from patterns, especially when those patterns reveal missed opportunities for support, connection, or care. In Maine, suicide deaths are recorded but not reviewed. We do not have a formal process to examine contributing factors or system-level gaps. Without that learning loop, prevention efforts remain fragmented, reactive, and incomplete.

Maine already reviews child deaths, overdose deaths, domestic violence homicides, and maternal mortality because we understand that learning from loss saves lives. Suicide is the only leading cause of death without this same level of examination. This gap limits our ability to improve prevention and leaves policymakers without the information needed to act effectively. **LD 2108 corrects that gap.**

This bill authorizes the Department of Health and Human Services to convene a multidisciplinary, trauma-informed Suicide Mortality Review Panel. The panel would bring together public health and behavioral health leaders, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, and community partners to look for patterns, strengthen coordination, and turn what we learn into practical, data-driven recommendations.

Suicide mortality review panels operate under strict confidentiality protections and focus on system-level learning, not individual fault. They are a proven tool, supported nationally by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. They are in use in other states, with promising results.

Since 2023 I have worked on Suicide Mortality Review efforts in Oregon, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. It has been an honor to finally use my expertise here at home. In the past year, The Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services secured a competitive cooperative agreement from the VA and formed a Suicide Mortality Review Advisory Team, engaged in a rigorous policy academy, and enacted an implementation plan which led us to this very moment. We are well positioned to launch with a centralized medical examiner system, strong cross-agency partnerships, and national technical assistance already supporting implementation. What we need now is the statutory authority to formalize this work, protect sensitive data, and ensure findings are translated into sustainable prevention efforts.

In Maine, suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people aged 10-24 and those aged 25-34. I have just aged out of the latter bracket. Too many of my friends are among those statistics. Every life lost to suicide leaves a ripple of deep grief and complex trauma. While we cannot make sense of these losses, we can make them mean something. And thus, I respectfully urge you to support LD 2108.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to ensuring everyone in Maine gets to enjoy "The Way Life Should Be."