



Consumer Council System of Maine
A Voice for Consumers of Mental Health Services

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April 9, 2021

Good Afternoon Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety.

My name is Simonne Maline. I am the Executive Director for the Consumer Council System of Maine (CCSM). I am here today on behalf of the CCSM to testify in opposition of **LD 769: An Act to Increase the Availability of Mental Health Services for a Defendant Who Has Been Found Incompetent to Stand Trial.**

The Consumer Council System of Maine is a public instrumentality written into State Statute by the Maine Legislature to serve in an advisory capacity and to provide legislators with guidance and advice regarding the delivery of effective and appropriate adult mental health services from those served by them.

We need to say that we as a State can and must do better by our fellow citizens. We have a duty to protect all residents of Riverview Psychiatric Center, not just those who get assaulted by fellow patients but also ones who are considered “too violent” for Riverview. We do not support the premise that sending people found incompetent to stand trial to prison is the answer. The Maine Legislature has fought these issues in previous sessions. In 2016, there was a similar bill, LD 1577 that was blocked by the Senate from passage.

Let’s take a moment to look back in the not so distant past. When you read the history of Riverview you will find that in the early 1900’s it was called the “Maine Insane Hospital” and there was a unit built to house the “criminally insane”. People who had a serious mental illness in Thomaston State Prison were moved to this unit in the hospital. We feel we are now going backward by returning some patients, no matter how small a number, to what is now Warren Correctional Facility which is still a PRISON.

How could we do this better? When Riverview Hospital was built, there



were plans for expansion in the architectural drawings. We again request to revisit this idea of a renovation of the Lower Saco acute forensic unit. Why? Because the way the unit is set up now you have a mix of new admissions along with folks who have acutely violent behaviors. There are six rooms in a row with the above-mentioned mixed populations and a person must go past other patients to even use the rest rooms. If those bed spaces were separated into two mini units: one for folks with highly volatile behaviors and then the other unit would be for patients being admitted who may not have any of the same issues. This would give both groups more space. It would make for a much greater chance to reduce any harmful behavioral disruptions and allow people to better focus on treatment in the hospital.

One final note, we are concerned as to who would oversee treatment if moved to Warren. At Riverview or any other hospital, we would know that licensing bodies like CMS or JACHO would make sure that standards were met.

For all these reasons and more, we strongly urge you to vote ought not to pass on LD 769.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Simonne M. Maline

Executive Director