



Testimony of Whitney A. Parrish

**LD 663 - Ought To Pass**

**An Act To Make Comprehensive Substance Use Disorder Treatment Available to Maine's Incarcerated Population**

Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

April 21, 2021

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

My name is Whitney Parrish, and I am the Advocacy and Communications Director for Health Equity Alliance (HEAL). Health Equity Alliance is a nonpartisan nonprofit public health and harm reduction organization that envisions and works toward a world where all people are valued and celebrated, and health justice is realized for everyone, regardless of who they are, where they come from, or what their lives look like.

I am here to testify in strong support of LD 663, **An Act To Make Comprehensive Substance Use Disorder Treatment Available to Maine's Incarcerated Population**, because no matter your circumstances or where you live, **everyone** deserves access to comprehensive, high quality health care and the support they need to achieve and maintain good health.

Health Equity Alliance provides harm reduction services and targeted case management to people who actively use drugs. Our services are comprehensive and rooted in compassionate, evidence-based practices because we know **these practices work**. We build trust through providing nonjudgmental services because **knowing and being reminded that you have inherent dignity and worth and are deserving of the same care as anyone else can make all the difference** in a person's life and health outcomes.

Although LD 663 deals specifically with the treatment side of drug use or substance use disorder, we believe its goal in providing comprehensive, compassionate, dignified care is not only essential to the health and safety of residents in our carceral settings, but to our overall strategy to reduce overdose deaths and increase overall public health.

Unfortunately, many of our clients are also familiar with being residents of our county and state facilities. They are familiar with what can happen when they enter a facility, an often physically and emotionally painful, humiliating, and sometimes dangerous experience that too often leads them no closer to health or recovery. To be clear, Health Equity Alliance envisions a world where we cease reliance on punitive measures to address drug use and substance use disorder. However, so long as people who use drugs are entering carceral settings, **it is absolutely critical that individuals have the health care they may need**



**while there.** Lack of this care is only compounding the issues you all hear about regarding substance use and so wholeheartedly tackle through your work here.

No matter where you live or what anyone thinks about the choices you make, **you deserve the medical care you need.** We are incredibly grateful to Representative Warren for her leadership on issues related to substance use and introducing this concrete step toward improved access to care and health for all Maine residents. HEAL respectfully urges the committee to vote **'Ought to Pass'** on LD 663.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to take any questions.