



Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine

The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

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Testimony in support of LD 1298

An Act To Reduce by Half the Funding of the Maine Drug Enforcement Agency and Redirect the Difference in Funding to Community-based Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Recovery Services

Sponsored by Representative Warren

May 12, 2021

Good morning Sen. Deschambault, Rep. Warren and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice & Public Safety. My name is Malory Shaughnessy, I am a resident of Westbrook and the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. The Alliance, the statewide membership association for Maine's community based mental health and substance use treatment providers, advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system.

On behalf of the Alliance I am here in support of LD 1298.

I mentioned this last time I was here, but if you have not yet read *Chasing the Scream* by Johann Hari, or [watched his TedTalk](#), you should. He highlights the decades of experience that have shown we cannot arrest and punish our way out of substance use and overdose deaths. LD 1298 begins to re-align our investment from one of arresting and a punitive response to one of treatment and a supportive approach.

This bill provides funding for community-based substance use disorder treatment and recovery services by reducing by half the funding for the Department of Public Safety, Maine Drug Enforcement Agency.

We must stop treating people affected by substance use disorders as criminals instead of patients. We need a humane and public health-informed response to ensure people stay alive and have the best opportunity to live and thrive in their community.

People break the law to get drugs, but only because we have made them illegal. During prohibition, drinking alcohol was illegal and so securing, or making, or selling alcohol was illegal. It did not stop people from drinking it. Making drugs illegal does not stop people from using them.

Arresting people and placing them in jail does not cure addiction.

"Defund the police" is a terribly misleading slogan, it sounds like abolishing all law enforcement -- but all it means is reallocating or redirecting some funding away from law enforcement to other agencies funded by the same governmental entity. That's it. It's that simple. Defund means to reallocate resources to a better purpose.

In this case, it means redirecting funding for public safety to public health -- which is another form of public safety.

Thank you for considering these comments. Please vote Ought to Pass on this important legislation.