

Jodi Hayashida
Maine Council of Churches

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety: I'm the Rev. Dr. Jodi Cohen Hayashida, I am a resident of Auburn and a member of the clergy serving a local congregation, and I am here today on behalf of the Maine Council of Churches to testify in favor of LD 1675.

One of the primary demands of people of faith is that we acknowledge every single life as sacred and Beloved. We are therefore called to love one another in word and deed.

For decades we as a nation have been told that the best way to love one another in regards to drug use is essentially through preventative and rehabilitative punishment. We've been taught that the threat of incarceration will prevent people from using. And if they are already using, incarceration will help them get clean.

Over these many years, however, we have learned that this reasoning is deeply untrue. Our prison population has exploded. We've learned that people of color and people living in poverty are incarcerated at much higher rates and for longer terms for drug possession than middle class and wealthy white folks for the same use and that this disparity is a feature not an accidental consequence, of the false war on drugs. Right now for example, right here, in some of Maine's drug laws there is a 1:3.5 crack cocaine/powder cocaine disparity. This disparity is a remnant of the government's explicit focus on decimating black communities.

We've also learned more about the science of addiction, what we now more appropriately call Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and have come to understand that in most cases incarceration is not only unlikely to facilitate recovery but also is likely to compound the trauma so often at the root of SUD.

In short, we've learned that our current practice of prosecution and incarceration isn't just ineffective, it is destructive, it's unjust, and, from the faith perspective, it is immoral. It is time for us to do something different.

What we understand now is that the practice of harm reduction saves lives. This understanding is backed up by science and backed up by lived experience. Which means that our work now is walking with people who are using and living with SUD instead of feeding them to an impersonal, voracious, and broken legal system.

This work feels hard for many of us- practically, emotionally, and spiritually, because we have internalized the false narrative of salvation through punishment and judgment. But we are all called to do what is right and just, not simply what is familiar. And so the Maine Council of Churches asks that you support LD1675. Thank you.