

Marshall Mercer
ME-RAP

Testimony in Favor of LD 1588
May 9, 2021

Dear Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Marshall Mercer. I am a student of recovery and an organizer with the Maine Recovery Advocacy Project. I am here today to read testimony for Gayla Sheldon in favor of LD 1588.

My name is Gayla Sheldon. Currently I am residing in Windham, Maine at the Southern Maine Women's Reentry Center. I am passionate about advocacy and a positive change into making this world a safer and healthier place for everyone. I am an advocate with the Maine Recovery Advocacy Project. I have been a recovery coach since 2017 and I have met some wonderful people. I have heard the stigmatizing language direct and indirect of individuals that suffer with a substance use disorder. I have heard the stigmatizing language such as junkie thrown out. People who suffer from substance use disorder should not be looked at differently than others. No one knows what kind of background each person is from; the traumatic events that took place nor can no one feel the harboring pain these individuals carry.

When people are used to being treated poorly then having the stigmatizing language throw around it is another way of tearing them down. That is not going to help that person's recovery. All that will do is make individuals feel lower about themselves. I have also heard the other stigmatizing language thrown around such as "inmate, prisoner, offender and repeat offender. As I stated above we all come from different backgrounds, traumatic events and the pain these individuals carry. Why use such language that will tear a person down more?

There has been many residents whom are incarcerated women and men, who have been through substance use programs; Cognitive based programs, Dialect Behavioral Therapy programs, parenting programs, Education and more. These individuals struggle beyond their comfort zone to seek support within their recovery. Some individuals feel so uncomfortable to participate in programming that may be of help in their recovery because of the stigmatizing remarks, not being able to trust anyone, not feeling safe enough to share personal things that others later may use against them. I hope that you all take into consideration on how the stigmatizing language used negatively impacts others. We all are supposed to encourage and uplift others, not tear them down.

I am testifying to LD 1588 Resolve, To Convene a Working Group To Identify and Find Replacements for Certain Stigmatizing References throughout the Maine Revised Statutes and Government Publications. I am in favor of my testimony of the LD 1588 bill to ensure that the stigmatizing language against others is a language that can possibly, be put to a stop and is not going to tear anyone else down. I care to much about others and It hurts me to see them hurting and there low self-esteem being lowered due to the surrounding stigmatized language. I believe, that the language change to person in recovery or resident, would benefit others immensely. This language change will not tear others down. I hope that this is taken into consideration. Thank you for taking the time in reading this.

Thank you
Sincerely: Gayla Sheldon