



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 1588
Resolve, to Convene a Working Group to Identify and Find Replacements for Certain Stigmatizing References throughout the Maine Revised Statutes and Government Publications

Sponsored by Representative Bill Pluecker

May 14, 2021

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

My name is Kaitlyn Morse. I am a resident of Westbrook, and the Policy Associate of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. We support 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.

Running for office took gumption. What held you back? Was there something you hoped the towns you represent wouldn't hear about when you ran? Have you overcome it? How?

Stigma is a negative association about a person. It is the difference between people sharing the story, you don't want them to, around town and the Black Lives Matter movement which advocates against prejudice and a negative stereotype about a group.

At the Alliance our members represent the full continuum of behavioral health – mental health, alcohol, and other drug use and addiction treatment services, and peer recovery supports. Access to care is one of the most important issues we work on and understand that the words our culture uses, the stories we tell, can hold people back from receiving the care they need more than the people themselves. People should be able to seek help without shame.

Convening a working group to identify when terms are used in a stigmatizing manner and using language that is person centered and respectful instead will help people move closer to treatment and the care they need.

In particular, this legislation would work toward replacing language as follows:
Convict and offender with person who has committed a crime.
Inmate and prisoner with resident.
Drug user with person who uses drugs.

Stigmatizing words are cited as one of the biggest hurdles people have for getting the care they need.

Over 75% of people with a mental illness report that they have experienced stigma. Addiction is considered a chronic illness. Treating mental health issues as if they are something people can overcome if they just "try harder" or "snap out of it," doesn't work and can lead to more difficult problems.

When a person struggling with mental illness or mental health challenges takes in negative ideas and stereotypes and applies it to themselves it can lead to shame, fear of disclosure, isolation, and despair.

Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12 step programs wouldn't work if it weren't for the anonymous piece. Anonymity is one of the biggest ways our clients finally find themselves able to access the help they need and overcome the barriers that hold them back. Stigmatizing words hold people back.

The Alliance believes in considering the words we use and making it easier for Maine people to get the recovery supports they need so they can successfully complete recovery. Let's support all members of our community to overcome the thing holding them back.

Thank you for supporting LD 1588.