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Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, honorable members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee. I am Mikki Rice from Freeman Township and I am here 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. I graduated from UMA with a Bachelor's in Mental Health and Human Services in 2015 and I had started in 2012 and the focus was on person-centered treatment and treating clients with respect. Here we are 6 years after I graduated and this concept is just finally hitting the Department of Corrections. This is long overdue, which is why I am asking you to support LD 1588.

A multi-disciplinary workgroup made up of Officers, Supervisors, Deputy Wardens and Behavioral Health Providers were tasked with considering the implications of the language that is currently used in Maine's Department of Corrections' written documents and introduced recommendations. In November 2020 Commissioner Liberty ordered the Maine Dept. of Corrections to implement several of that workgroups' recommendations.

As part of the recommendations, the Dept. of Corrections will change the way they refer to the people that are in the criminal justice system and are under their care. The language will now be person-centered and respectful. So now, instead of calling someone a "prisoner" or "inmate" they will use terms like "Client" or "Resident". They will also use respectful, person-centered language in other instances as well. For instance instead of calling someone who has previously met addiction criteria, "an addict", they may instead write, "resident that previously met criteria for addiction in the DSM". They have agreed to make such changes on any document produced by the DOC that is created moving forward which is good. But why not expand on that? LD 1588 would do just that.

LD 1588 would implement a task force to look at the language used in the Revised Maine Statutes and the Executive branch rules, forms, policies, and publications to find stigmatizing language such as "inmate", "prisoner", "addict", etc... and replace them with person-centered, non stigmatizing language. We already have the changes being made with the DOC, why not implement them with all government publications?

As Commissioner Liberty has previously said, "Words Matter".

In all public service organizations that I've come in contact with since graduating in 2015, they follow best practices. One of the best practices that is followed, is person-centered treatment. Everyone deserves autonomy and to be treated with dignity and respect. There is no reason that I can see, where they wouldn't want to look for stigmatizing language and get rid of it. Words can change perception. The Department of Corrections took the right step and now it's time to expand that out further. We should be using person-centered language in our government publications and there is no reason to use language that is isolating and not inclusive.

I urge you to support LD 1588 to create a task force to look for, remove, and replace any stigmatizing language in the Maine Revised Statutes and other government publications because it is long overdue.

Thank you for listening to my testimony and I will try to answer your questions.