

Testimony for LD 1862  
Rev. Stephen Carnahan  
February 9, 2022

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren , and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety: my name is Stephen Carnahan, I am a resident of Auburn and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1862.

I have served almost 40 years as a pastor in the United Church of Christ, most of those years here in Maine. Like anyone who does this work I have come face to face with the problems of addiction. I have met and worked with many people who are involved in the difficult and courageous struggle against addiction. I am well aware of the devastating effect addiction has on individuals, families and communities.

As a Christian, I could look at this issue and this bill from a moralistic point of view. Christians believe that it is our responsibility to help people in need. This bill is named for one of the stories Jesus told in which a man stopped to help someone who could not help himself. Although there was animosity between the ethnic groups of the man in need and the man who discovered him on the side of the road, he stopped and helped him anyhow. This man became known as the Good Samaritan. Christians have always understood that we are also called to help anyone in need.

But there is also a very practical issue here, and one that needs no Bible story to justify it. How often does someone in need go un-helped because the people there are afraid that they will put themselves in danger of arrest or imprisonment simply by calling 911 and getting help for someone? Because those on the scene of an overdose are fearful of the consequences of getting involved, they may leave the victim without calling for help.

This, of course complicates things for the rest of us. First of all, the victim of the overdose may die. Not only is this the loss of a citizen, a person of value, it may lead to investigations, arrests, trials, and other matters that are costly to the people of Maine. It is a loss that is needless and preventable. It may also be that the victim survives without help. Then we are looking at EMT costs, hospitalizations and rehab; again a cost to the people of Maine.

It also puts our police officers in a tough position, in which they have to consider the needs of the victim as well as the legal situations of those present. This can get very complicated. This bill proposes a change to the law that will take away the fear of those who are present at the time of an overdose. It will enable them to get help without putting themselves in legal jeopardy.

That takes me back to the moral issue: why would we not simply make it easier for helpers to help by removing their fear of other legal consequences? Let us let the helpers help. Thank you.