



# Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine

## *The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers*

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive Director

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### Testimony in Support of LD 1862

### An Act To Strengthen Maine's Good Samaritan Laws Concerning Drug-related Medical Assistance

My name is Malory Shaughnessy, I live in Westbrook, and I am the Executive Director of the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the 35 members of the Alliance **in support of LD 1862, An Act To Strengthen Maine's Good Samaritan Laws Concerning Drug-related Medical Assistance.**

The Alliance is the statewide association for Maine's community based mental health and substance use treatment providers. The Alliance advocates for the implementation of sound policies and evidence-based practices that serve to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system. We believe all Mainers should have full access to the continuum of recovery-oriented systems of care for mental illness and substance use disorder – from prevention and harm reduction, through treatment, and into peer recovery support.

If you have not yet read *Chasing the Scream* by Johann Hari, or watched his [TedTalk](#), you should. **He highlights what decades of experience has shown us -- we cannot arrest and punish our way out of substance use and overdose deaths.** We know now that substance use disorder is a health condition and not a crime. It should be treated as such. We need to change our drug laws to save lives rather than fill our jails and prisons.

We support this expansion legislation because the current Good Samaritan Law, while well intended, is limited in scope. The threat of criminal penalties continues to instill fear in individuals at the scene of an overdose, hindering them from calling for help.

That's because Maine's Good Samaritan law only protects the person who calls 911 and the person who is overdosing from arrest or prosecution for a handful of drug-related crimes and probation violations. No one else in the home is shielded.

Maine's Good Samaritan law also does not protect anyone, including the person who called for help, from being searched by police when they arrive at the scene.

The “Know Your Options” website is an initiative of the Maine Office of Behavioral Health and other state agencies as part of an education campaign to save lives by preventing overdose death. The Alliance applauds this initiative and have seen it successfully at work. The guidelines include urging people to test drugs to make sure they know what’s in them, use drugs in the company of others, not alone, and make sure people around them know what to do in case of an overdose.

Expanding the Good Samaritan law would make calling for help in case of an overdose much more likely. **We urge an Ought to Pass vote on this legislation for the sake of the estimated 636 Maine people that died of overdose last year alone.**