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Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine *The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers*

Malory Otteson Shaughnessy, Executive Director

February 9, 2022

Senator Deschambault, Chair

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Members, Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Testimony in Support of LD 696 **An Act To Prohibit Solitary Confinement in Maine's** **Corrections System**

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 696, An Act To Prohibit Solitary Confinement in Maine's Corrections System.**

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.

We join the many others who are before you today urging you to ban solitary confinement in our corrections system. You need only look at the news most days to see that far too often, those who need help and treatment are put behind bars instead of finding the community-based treatment or support for their mental health or substance use issues.

The Alliance works diligently with the legislature and administration to shift this paradigm and make sure that treatment and crisis services that help people avoid ending up in jail are funded appropriately. We know that sadly, over 80% of people in county jails are on some kind of mental health medication. Because our community systems are so underfunded, our corrections system has become the mental health facility of last resort.

Sadly, one recent study (2021) found that “prisoners with mental illness, especially bipolar disorder, severe depression and schizophrenia, were up to

170% more likely to be placed in solitary for extended periods¹. This is not only an inequitable situation, it is actively causing harm to so many. Prisoners with mental illnesses need services, support, and connection, not isolation and punishment. For many, the experience of solitary may be impossible to ever recover from, making a mockery of the word “corrections” and causing untold psychological harm.

From another perspective, people who are incarcerated for criminal behavior who are put in solitary confinement are very likely to develop severe mental health issues. Research shows that anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and psychosis are common results of even short-term solitary confinement. And in these cases, the system is creating more people who need services for the long-term.

We urge you to prohibit this practice in Maine as we work with you to ensure that there are appropriate services for people throughout the state.

¹ Siennick SE, Picon M, Brown JM & Mears DP. (2021) Revisiting and unpacking the mental illness and solitary confinement relationship. Justice Quarterly