

My name is Kai Weatherbee and I am currently a resident at the Maine State Prison. As an individual whose life has been shaped by the cycle of addiction, homelessness, and prison, I know firsthand how hard it is to actually receive tangible help.

For the individual who's actively using, the moments of courage and clarity of mind to pick up the phone and call for help are fleeting. We are lucky if they last minutes; they probably won't last for hours, and they definitely won't last for days. When someone finally finds it within themselves to make that call and then be told "we are sorry, we have no beds available, maybe call back tomorrow", crushes their hope and will power. What percent of addicts are able to keep the mindset of hope, courage, and clarity after crying out for help and being rejected? How many will actually make that call in the first place? From my experience, even when you do, you are told the same thing, "There aren't any beds available please call back tomorrow". This virtually guarantees the incarceration or the overdose and possible death of an individual who has cried out for help and was denied.

We do not seem to have a problem allocating funds on the back end of the problem. Imprisoning people for drug offenses is not a solution; on the contrary, it compounds the problem. To overcome the barriers a criminal record presents is hard enough for an average citizen. For someone already struggling with the problems drug addiction brings it is seemingly impossible.

As a recovering drug addict L.D. 1975 is an essential step in ending the stigmatization of those who are caught in the cycle of addiction, an essential step in protecting the future victims of crimes committed in the pursuit of drugs, an essential step in saving the lives of our associates, friends, and loved ones who struggle with the disease of addiction. I ask that anyone hearing or reading this testimony please lend your support for L.D. 1975 because for many of us it is literally a matter of life or death.