

Robin Russel
Hermon

My name is Robin Russel. I live in Hermon and I am a Professor at the University of Maine's School of Social Work in Orono. I teach courses in social welfare policy, including health and mental health policy. I am here to testify in favor of LD1045 which would provide all Maine residents with the ability to pay for needed health and mental health services. However, I am going to focus my remarks on the mental health provisions in this bill.

Social workers are the leading provider of mental health services in this country. One in five adults, more than 43 million Americans, experience mental illness in a given year (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2019). The incidence of mental illness among adults and children has escalated during the pandemic. More than half of people with a mental illness do not receive treatment (Segal, 2020). Insurers are not required by federal law to cover mental health services. And, for the many people who have no health insurance, the cost of mental health treatment is more than they can afford. People who reported seeking mental health services, but were not able to receive them, gave lack of adequate health insurance as the most frequent reason (Segal, Gerdes & Steiner, 2019).

The cost of untreated mental illness is huge. Individuals with untreated mental illness suffer needlessly, and the health and stability of their families is also impacted. I say they suffer needlessly, because research indicates that 70-90% of people with serious mental illness can reduce their symptoms and improve their quality of life. But, without treatment, many turn to drugs and alcohol to self-medicate, which can lead to addiction. It is no wonder that a high proportion of the mentally ill have co-occurring disorders.

The cost to society includes lost wages; the cost to the nation is about \$200 billion dollars in lost earnings each year (Segal, 2020). Untreated mental illness has also led to an increased numbers of Maine residents in the criminal justice system. And it also has led to higher rates of homelessness and reduction in the labor force.

I urge passage of LD1045. It is time to provide access to affordable mental health care for all Maine residents.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Robin Russel, JD, PhD

References:

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