

February 11, 2021

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



Greetings Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and Honorable members of the Health and Human Services Committee.

My name is Jan Collins. I am assistant director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition. I am here to support LD 118 An Act To Address Maine's Shortage of Behavioral Health Services for Minors. MPAC's mission is to support Maine's incarcerated citizens, their families, and friends in their struggle with Maine's criminal justice system. Our purpose is to reduce Maine's use of incarceration by creating a criminal justice system that is ethical, humane, and restorative in nature.

Encouraging the development of community resources that treat people with mental illness in the community not in jails is a priority. Keeping youth with mental illness out of the criminal justice system is number one.

The connection between serious mental illness and incarceration has long been known with statistics varying between [37 and 44%](#) of inmates suffering from one or more conditions. If we include substance use disorder the statistics only rise.

We see similar statistics in youth. In 2017, a Cutler Institute, Place Matters report found that [29% of youth at Long Creek](#) came directly from residential treatment.

Using WebMD to search for child and adolescent psychiatrists serving my community in Franklin County, I find a response of 0, when I increase the distance to a 100 mile radius there are still no child psychiatrist. Using the search tool from [Psychology Today](#), we find a total of one Child and Adolescent Psychologist in Maine and six nurses mostly clustered in southern Maine.

No wonder then that when I talked with a nurse in charge of the emergency department in our local rural hospital, asking her what her number one issue was, she did not hesitate to respond "lack of mental health beds". She then proceeded to spend at least 30 minutes explaining the impact on our very small hospital of having one or more patients unable to leave the ED for lack of psychiatric beds in Maine.

I understand that this bill will only collect data, and I understand why. But it saddens me that the suffering of our youth in mental health crisis will continue for at least two more years because we have decided that a lower tax rate is more important than their ability to receive health care.

Please support LD 118 An Act to Address Maine's Shortage of Behavioral Health Services for Minors. Or, better yet, do something concrete to increase the availability of mental health beds in Maine.

Thank-you,
Jan M. Collins

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Key Statistics-

- Percent of people in state and federal prisons who have been diagnosed with a mental illness: **37% +**
- In locally-run jails: **44% +**
- Number of people experiencing "serious psychological distress" in jails: **1 in 4 +**
- Percent of people in federal prisons who reported not receiving any mental health care while incarcerated: **66% +**
- Percent of police shootings in 2015 that involved a mental health crisis: **27% +**
- Portion of people jailed 3+ times within a year who report having a moderate or serious mental illness: **27% +**

- Prison Policy Initiative